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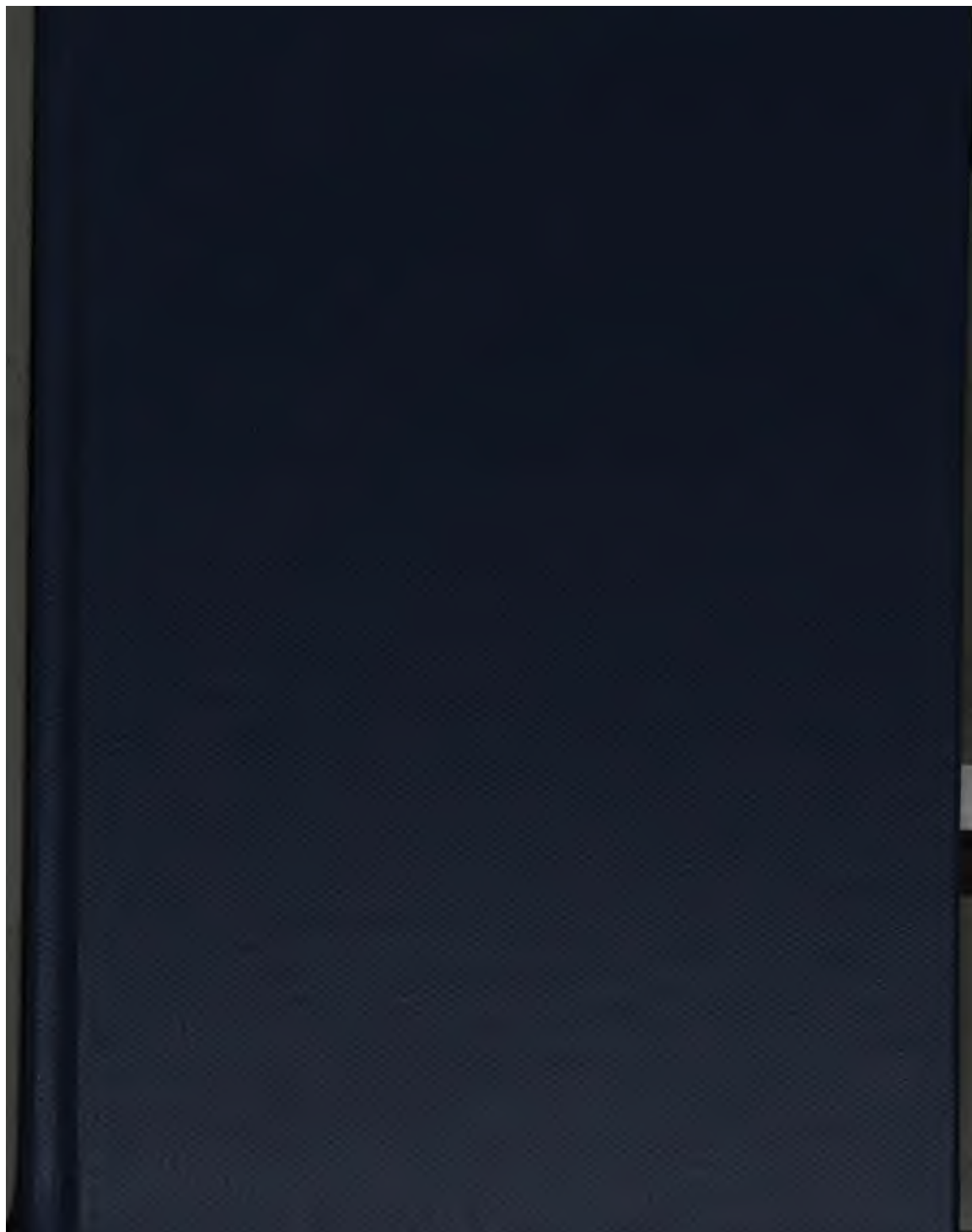
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SAUL, A MYSTERY.

SAUL,
A MYSTERY.

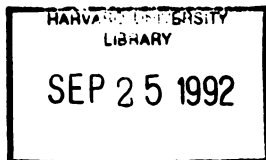
An Evil Spirit from the Lord troubled him.

BY
THE AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIAN BALLADS," "ATHANASION,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON & CO., 200 BROADWAY.
HARTFORD:
H. S. PARSONS, 6 CENTRAL ROW.

1845.

AL 1083.2.30



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1992



EPISTLE.

TO

JOHN JAY, ESQ.,

BEDFORD.

MY DEAR JAY,

YOU are too familiar with the wonderful histories of Holy Writ, to need any intimation that the subject of the Mystery which I dedicate to you, is one of the most interesting which the older Scriptures present. The character of Saul appears to me, to combine those attributes in which the Tragic Muse has heretofore found her noblest material. Magnificent as Prometheus, he is yet wretched as Œdipus, and wicked as Macbeth. I was aware, therefore, from the beginning, how difficult it would be to do justice to my great theme; but experience has convinced me that the greatest difficulties attending it were of a class not foreseen, and of which, as others may not suspect it, I am desirous of reminding you.

I was led to choose a sacred subject, from a conviction that such are the most noble, and the least

appreciated ; and from a mysterious and almost romantic love of the very geography of the Holy Land, co-existing with a deep desire to recommend the study of sacred lore, in preference of the worn-out fables of classic Mythology. The finest dramatic hero of Holy Scripture, seemed to me, moreover, to have been singularly overlooked ; and the endeavour to inspire others with the deep and awful interest which always moved my spirit at the name of Palestine, or the mention of Saul and David, appeared to be a work, on which I might ask and expect the blessing of the God of my youth. But I did not apprehend the straits, within which my high estimate of my undertaking would necessarily hedge me ; nor the scruples which a deeper inspection of the blessed Scriptures would excite, as to the lawfulness of employing its narrations as material for plastic fancy. I was familiar, it is true, with the delicate sensibility of Racine, expressed in the preface to his Esther ; but I am sorry to say that, at first, the deep conscientiousness which I have since learned to honour even more than the genius of its subject, struck me as morbid, if not weak. The historical books of Scripture are indeed the least objectionable ground-work for fictitious illustration ; and the uninspired narrations of Josephus may be taken as a providential intimation that sacred history has also a place in the civil and social history of the world : but I am constrained to acknowledge that, like Jacob at Bethel, I entered comparatively lightly upon a field, in which I was soon brought to exclaim, *how awful is this place*. Even the least interesting portions of Holy Writ, have

convinced me that they came in no sense, "by the will of man." The characters they set before us are the speculative creations of no superficial judgment; they are, as it were, transcripts from the great books that shall be opened at the Last Day; THE HOLY SPIRIT has revealed them, for example and warning, to all succeeding generations of men; and with their story, we ourselves are in some way mysteriously concerned.

A deepening sense of this great truth has fettered and restrained me in writing. Passages, which I approved as an artist, I have been forced to prune away, as a Christian. And thus, though I present you with the work completed, I do not pretend that it is finished; and if, for allowing it to go forth as it is, I shall be thought, by good men, to have erred in judgment, I can only say that I shall rejoice in the oblivion, to which it is probably destined.

As to the propriety of treating sacred subjects in the dramatic form, I need urge no other plea, than the example of so grave a bishop as S. Gregory Nazianzen, who could employ this means of setting forth no less a theme than "CHRIST and Him Crucified." Grotius, who followed the venerable father, in a Latin Tragedy with the same high argument, has, in his preface, expressed himself with great beauty, as to the limit of a poet's freedom with inspired narrative, and the revealed order of events; and although his rules have chief reference to the thrice holy ground of the sacred Gospels, I have endeavoured generally to regard them, in dealing with the story of Saul. What latitude I

have allowed myself, has usually been in accordance with admitted canons of criticism, or at least such as not materially to affect the fact. The purely imaginative portions of the poem, will be found symbolical of principles which I deemed it important to keep in mind; and this remark I make with special allusion to the part sustained in the plot by the Ideal of an evil spirit. I was not satisfied, as a mere dramatist would be, with representing the apostate monarch as a prey merely to his own conflicting passions: for the Christian is bound to believe that, like all who trifle with their election of God, he had become the subject of infernal excitement to sin, and to ruin. This fearful truth I have not cared to explain away after the pert and conceited philosophy of an age that lacks the greatest element of noble mind—religious veneration. Exhibiting this principle in the conception of Merodach, I have also united with it an illustration of the evil conscience and unrepented sin, which gave Satan such advantage over the soul of his servant. That haunting of remorse, which the greatest of poets has so powerfully pictured in the blood-boltered Banquo, I have more feebly symbolized in the *body of death*, which the Evil Spirit is represented as inhabiting for the purpose of producing, in his victim, the deeper despair. From the Hadad of our lamented Hillhouse, I perhaps took the hint of such a demoniacal possession; and though I employ it for a purpose so different from his that the acknowledgment might not be demanded, I am glad of the opportunity of paying this passing tribute to a fine fan-

cy and gentle heart, of which his country has been so prematurely bereaved.

I will only add that if I have occasionally preferred to walk in other than buskin'd measures, I have found it almost indispensable, in varying a poem of such length and seriousness. One consigned by Inspiration itself to the laugh and scorn, as well as the fear of men, will be found chief speaker in the groundling style : and as for the mere machines of the action, I have not scrupled to let them talk, as I suppose the rustics of all lands have in all ages been wont to talk. And so I leave you to your own criticisms, with the intimation, that though half the Horatian period of seasoning has passed over my poem, between its first sketch, and the present date, you must not expect a much greater degree of finish, on that account. During that time, I have been forced by graver studies to leave it untouched for years together : and duties every way of paramount importance have only allowed me to make this work an occasional amusement, while (to translate from Grotius) I strove to vary the odd hours which I was able to steal from severer occupations for the refreshing cultivation of the Muse, in such wise that even they might not be lost to Christian meditation.

Remember sometimes the charming autumnal evening and the delightful retreat, of which my date will remind you. Hither have we often retired together from the noisy city, whose hum is musical when once we hear it across the broad Hudson, so mellowed as only to tell us that we have escaped its din : and here to-day

you have read the completed work, which from the first I proposed to inscribe with a name dear to my country for his sake who wore it once, and to me for his who wears it now.

Ever faithfully yours,

A. C. C.

WEEHAWKEN,

October 13, 1842.

ADVERTISEMENT.

ALTHOUGH this Poem was announced as about to be published in the fall of 1842, it has been withheld for private reasons, which now no longer interfere with the fulfillment of the author's obligations to those kind friends, who have been pleased to express an impatience to see it forthcoming. It has, perhaps, been benefitted by the delay.

ST. JOHN'S RECTORY, HARTFORD,

February, 1845.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SAUL,	AHINOAM,
DAVID,	ABIGAIL,
JONATHAN,	HEZRO,
ABNER,	MERODACH,
ABISHAI,	DOEG,
AMASA,	HAG,
AHIMELECH,	HUNCHBACK,
ABIATHAR,	COWHERD,
ZADOK,	A PHILISTINE CHIEF,
THE PROPHET SAMUEL,	THE WITCH OF ENDOR,

HERALDS, OUTLAWS, SHEPHERDS, ETC. ETC. ETC.

The SCENE is chiefly laid in the hill country of Judæa, and parts adjacent ; but changes in the fourth act to the mountains surrounding the valley of Esdrelon.

SAUL.
A MYSTERY.

AN EVIL SPIRIT FROM THE LORD TROUBLED HIM.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *The wilderness near Gibeah of Saul. A high place, looking eastward over a valley. The dawn slowly breaking over Mount Nebo in the distance. DAVID worshipping.*

DAVID.

Now roll the mists away,
That swathed the slumbering world,
Through all the silent night.
The heavens are telling, Lord,
Thy glory and thy power,
As light goes forth into the silent soul,
Of meditative man,
And calls as with a voice ;
Waking, like echoes in its labyrinths

Responsive litanies,
To thy most holy fear.

Out of the East he rides,
First of the heavenly host,
The glorious Lord of day ;
And o'er the mountain-tops ablaze,
In flaming colours decked to run his race,
Like a strong giant comes.
And, as the earliest sunbeam
Gleams o'er the dewy flowers,
See how a cloud hath risen up
Of incense, from the Earth ;
The while, the happy birds
Ring orisons, which first they learned
When sung the stars of morning,
Over the new world.
So, as thy love, oh Lord,
Lights up my soul within,
My spirit like a censer doth exhale
In clouds of praise and prayer,
And my first thoughts are winged things,
That sing and soar to Thee.

Continues awhile in silent worship.

My day's begun. Who knows where it must end !
I'll venture on—for God is merciful,
And the sweet unction of my morning prayer,
Makes strong to bear, or do. Good day, bring forth ;
And if some ill is struggling in thy womb,
Faith, though no Pharaoh, kills it in the birth.

[Goes into the thicket.]

JONATHAN enters with a page.

JONATHAN.

The good old paths are sadly overgrown,
 In our dear father's realm! Look sharply lad;
 The stone of Ezel stands upon this height,
 One of the ancient landmarks. Once 'twas plain,
 And the wayfaring Israelite would halt
 Here on the pleasant mound, to scan its face,
 And learn his pious way of pilgrimage
 Towards Holy Salem. Quick, the king's afield,
 And day rides far into the firmament.

PAGE.

Something is stirring in the thicket here;
 I'll shoot at venture!

JONATHAN.

Hold, thou little Nimrod;
 Down with thine arrow! There's the Ezel stone,
 Look, at thy very feet!

PAGE.

This gray old thing!

JONATHAN.

Pluck up the weeds—I know its honest face,
 The famous goal of many a kind appointment
 In our more sunny fortunes. Dear old stone,
 Dews, and the ashy moss, discolour it,
 But still, the chiselling of ancient faith
 Shows forth the mystic symbol of the Tree
 Twined by the Brazen Serpent—quaint device!

For so, our most religious ancestry
Made all things minister the fear of God !

PAGE.

You hum a song: comes there no chorus to it ?

JONATHAN. (*Shoots.*)

Ay, there's the chorus,—hear the bow-string twang !
Now boy, go find the arrows which I fly ;
Look, yon old tree's the mark !

PAGE. (*Running.*)

I would 'twere game !

JONATHAN. (*Shoots.*)

Beyond thee lad ! Run—is it not beyond !
Make speed—haste—tarry not—beyond, I say !

PAGE. (*Returning.*)

Nay—here it is ! It rived a gnarled knot.
Oh, had it been a buck, that gnarled knot,
I had run quicker.

JONATHAN.

Prithee, prithee, peace !

Go, gather up my spent artillery,
And haste thee back to town.

PAGE.

Art angry sir ?

There is some sorrow in thy heart to-day.

JONATHAN.

Nay—but the king's afield—I will not hunt ;
Go lad, I'll walk alone.

PAGE.

God's mercy with you !

[Goes.

(DAVID rushes forward, and they embrace each other.)

JONATHAN.

There—I have told thee all ! The king's not near,
And face to face we may pronounce farewell.

DAVID.

What of the banquet ! Tell me all, my brother.
Did the king mark my vacant place betimes !

JONATHAN.

Thy harp was all the banquet that he craved,
When, at our festival, his eager eye
Looked o'er the couches for his laureate.

DAVID.

And said he nothing ?

JONATHAN.

To himself he muttered,
Surely there's somewhat hath befallen him,
Or else he is defiled !

DAVID.

But next time, what !

JONATHAN.

With anger and a frown—where's Jesse's son ?
To which I made response—as thou didst bid ;
Twas the new moon of Bethlehem—I said,

A yearly gathering which his father holds
 Of all his family, for sacrifice,
 And kindly memories, what time the flocks
 Go forth into the hills, and shepherds there
 Pass the long nights in watching. Then I weaved
 A story of my fancy, to beguile him,
 Of feasts, and wreaths, and garlands, on this vigil,
 With that tradition of thy family,
 That first in Bethlehem shall Shiloh come.

DAVID.

Years may fulfill thy fancy! Was he wroth?

JONATHAN.

He raved somewhat.

DAVID.

Thou dost not tell me all.

JONATHAN.

Why should'st thou hear the rant of one distraught?
 He said, thou wouldst usurp my future crown;
 And thus, to show thee how I fear 'tis true,
 I came as we agreed, and cried Beyond,
 That thou might'st learn Beware—and hie away
 From the accursed thirst of guiltless blood,
 That dogs thee for such dreams.

DAVID.

The Lord forgive him;
 I'm lower, than I thought me in his hate!
 But Jonathan, thou bear'st too much for me;

Go, leave me, thou hast many brethren—go,
Thou hast one father only!

JONATHAN.

'Twas a fit!
Think not so deeply of it—'twas a fit!

DAVID.

Such fits are born of purpose.

JONATHAN.

'Tis a phrensy!
He's always frantic when this fever's on him,
And I endure it, like an autumn wind,
'Knowing 'tis fickle as 'tis boisterous.

DAVID.

Naught can unravel mind's distemperment,
But his is of a shrewd and cunning thread!

JONATHAN.

Oh—thou hast never learned my father's mood!
I hope the Lord looks not on it, as thou,
Or else He counts it sin. Dost hear one coming!
He hath been wont to walk the wilderness,
And 'tis not safe to talk. I pray thee David,
Love him no less, but name him in thy prayers,
And count this trial of our brotherhood,
Naught but the angel of our love, who thus
Doth prove perchance, to some accusing spirit,
What Jobs we are in friendly constancy!

DAVID.

Go—and the angel of old Jacob guard thee!

JONATHAN.

The God of Abraham be your hiding place.

[*Goes.*

DAVID.

There goes the heir of Israel! Such a star
 As Jacob, on his death-couch, strengthened him
 With prophet-eye to see! Now therefore, Lord,
 If on my boyhood's head anointing oil
 Breathed fatal odours of far royalty,
 And Judah's honours must in me revive;
 Oh order all in mercy, gracious God,
 Nor let the sceptre pass to David's hands,
 Till hoary hairs, when Jonathan hath reigned,
 And in high glory, like a sunset, died!

SAUL. (*In the forest.*)

Ho—did I hear thy voice, my Jonathan!
 Nay—hark—a raven cried.

DAVID.

Oh now he comes!

I hear the brush-wood snap 'neath heavy strides;
 A strong man's step—that walketh thoughtfully,
 And mutters to himself. Now, save me God!
 But half a glimpse, and who is it but Saul!
 The giant bearing of a Lucifer,
 As brilliant and as blighted! Son of morning,
 'Tis thine own sin, if I'm thine enemy;
 Yet rouse me not thou brawny Anakim,
 For I have faced a giant once before!

[*Hides.*

SAUL. (*Entering.*)

What glory through this woodland opening shows,
 Of the aspiring day! Shine on, broad sun,
 But oh what mockery is external nature,
 To one whose heart hath naught in harmony.
 How can the world look bright, when I, its lord
 Dwell ever in pavilions of thick cloud!
 Oh come thou darkest night,—come death,—come hell,
 Come anything, but sun succeeding sun,
 To shew the same stale scene to my dull eye,
 And flout me with old nothingness anew.
 Stop, did I pray to die! I'll think of that!
 In Sheol, 'tis the spirit that survives,
 And 'tis the body only, we escape,
 By change of places; that which suffers here,
 Is what we are, and not what we possess!
 Ah, is there rest in all the realms of God,
 For one whose inmost being burns like mine!

[*Passes.*]

DAVID. (*Returning.*)

How awful 'tis to be cast off of God!
 He saw me not—and there he stalks away
 Like those of old renown, before the Flood,
 Borne by frail Beauty to the fallen ones.
 The Lord forbid I should do aught to thee,
 Thou miracle of might and manliness,
 Whose better nature cannot be extinct,
 But like the majesty of buried fire,
 Bursts forth unsmothered in the deep of night,
 And blazes ne'er so high! Alas, poor Saul,

He could not bear this kindly rise of day,
Whose glimpse I welcomed from my forest-couch,
As if its first good morrow were to me!

[*Hides.*

SAUL. (*Returning.*)

An evil spirit from the Lord is on me!
I'll thrid awhile the alleys of this wood,
And let the melting mood of meditation
Thaw my cold heart, if there, by blessed chance,
Some seeds not rooted up, of early planting,
May blossom to a prayer! Oh never, never!
Sathanas! There's a great behemoth spider
Dropping into my face. A curse on trees,
That have such tenantry of dangling vermin,
Suggestive of the devil's workmanship,
And token of his presence. Ugh—how ugly;
I think some spirit works in that clawed body,
All mind and venom! Up thy ladder, fiend,
Clew up thy tether to thy nest again!
I do believe these hideous things are elves:
Newts, lizards, toads and spiders, spit at me,
And crawl upon me, sleeping and awake,
So that I do believe, a bed in hell,
Were less than this intolerable world!

[*Passes.*

DAVID. (*Returning.*)

How awful 'tis to be cast off of God!
Hear not such murmurs Lord, 'gainst thy good world,
Nor cloud this glorious sunrise in thine anger!

For 'tis a picture angels might desire,
 That from this opening, freshens on the sight,
 Of vale and stream, and yon far height of Nebo,
 Where Moses stood mid seraphim, entranced,
 And now the coloured East, in golden light,
 Rests like the halo of his sanctity !

SCENE II. *Naioth. The Highway in the forest.* SAUL
 and SAMUEL.

SAMUEL.

Nay then my son—is Saul among the prophets !
 Pray then to GOD in this most gracious hour,
 If thy long sin may be, perchance, forgiven ;
 And know old Samuel ever pleads for thee !

SAUL.

Leave me not father !

SAMUEL.

God hath bid me leave thee !

SAUL.

Who made me king in Gilgal ?

SAMUEL.

Answer first,

Who made thee priest in Gilgal ?

SAUL.

Why did God

Choose me to scourge this stubborn Israel !
 Did I desire thee ! I who hid myself,
 Amid the stuffs at Mizpeh ;—and retired
 From that high homage, to my herds again,
 Till dragged unwilling to a throne I loathed !
 Who made me king that cursed morn, in Gilgal !
 Oh father thou hast robbed me of my days,
 And God vouchsafes to man no second life-time,
 To sow discretion's harvest on a field,
 Where old experience might plough down the tares.
 Now let me weep upon thy bosom, father ;
 I've longed to see that rev'rend beard once more,
 And have thy shrivelled hands hold out a blessing ;
 For, like repenting Esau, would I cry
 If my supplanter has thy first embrace,
 Hast thou no benison for even me ;
 Bless even me, my father, ere I die !

SAMUEL.

Repent before high heaven of all thy sin,
 For thy good angel is departing thee ;
 And he who long hath grieved for thee in vain,
 To Ramah now hath ta'en him, once for all,
 Making seclusion death's own ante-chamber,
 Till called to go within. Farewell, my child ;
 Thine eye hath seen old Samuel, for the last ;
 Think of his many prayers for thee my son,
 When his cold lips can utter them no more.

SCENE III. *Another part of the forest. SAUL wandering wildly about.*

SAUL.

In clouds of wonder and of thought he dwells,
Lurk where he may. His spirit lives alone,
In the pavilion of deep mysteries ;
Or flaming forth, upon the cherub wings
Of Poesie and Music, his high soul,
Rides like a victor, o'er the Sabaoth
Of marshalled words and sounds. Ah, how I hate
The might majestic I am forced to praise!

BOY. (*Running in.*)

Hast seen a gray-haired shepherd hereabouts ?
It is my father, a most aged man ;
Hast seen my father, please you ?

SAUL.

Get thee gone.

BOY.

Oh, crave your mercy, you're some mighty man,
I did not mean it, but I'm out o' breath ;
Oh sir I've lost my father.

SAUL.

Pretty lad,

Come here :—hast heard the neighbouring woodmen say
Whether Lord David hath been here at Ramah,
Or lurketh in this forest ?

BOY.

Let me go ;

I met a gentle person hereabouts,
That answered me, more kindly than my lord !

[Goes.]

SAUL.

Now, here's a shepherd's bastard loves his sire,
But I, who got true sons of fairest wives,
And gave them dukedoms—Lord, have I a child,
Would hunt so painfully his wandering father,
As I my father's asses ! Oh, it chafes me ;
That boy of mine has but a maiden's spirit.
He'd make a distaff of old Judah's sceptre,
And pledge his birth-right for the mercest pottage,
This harping Jacob shall cajole him with.
Oh what's to be a king, with such a scion
Withering from my old roots ! A falling house ;
A traitor in the servant that I bought ;
An heir, with just enough of Saul within him,
To be rebellious—not a friend to bless me ;
No, not an oracle, or juggling priest
To bid me peace ; and, for a minister,
Naught but a conscience that's beside itself ;
And hate, that like the scorpion, venteth venom,
Mighty to wound, but fool in every aim,
And suicide at last ! A scorpion was it ?
Here's the young basilisk that stings his sire !
My Jonathan, good morrow ! Is it true
Thatimps are nearest when ye think of them !

JONATHAN. (*Entering.*)

God save the king my father! Art thou ill!
I fear the king is ill.

SAUL.

Nay, hope it rather,
If ill—'tis better for thy friend the harper!

JONATHAN.

I bless the Lord; thou wilt recall him then,
With the sooth med'cine of his kindly harp!

SAUL.

Nay, by the Serpent! How should I recall him,
When 'twas thyself that didst dismiss the vagrant!
Thou knowest how I sought him at the feast.

JONATHAN.

Not in such wise, as welcomes are express'd;
Nor in such tones, as were his daily meed,
When first, with that sweet lyre composing thee,
His flying hand, as at a magic loom,
Knit thy soothed spirit, warp and woof, with his,
And made thee love him.

SAUL.

Oh, surpassing craft!
The juggler weaves like magic o'er thine eyes,
And plays his sleight-of-hand about thine head,
To cheat it of a crown!

JONATHAN.

Nay, blest be God,

The crown is, on a higher head, cemented
By holiest unction. May it ne'er be mine !

SAUL.

Hast thou not mark'd how that high head grows hoar !
The silver crown my age begins to wear,
Forewarns me of decay : for 'tis the image
Of that above, which o'er the stream of life,
Our better angel holdeth out betimes,
In token that our days are few to win it.
Believe me, for myself 'tis all I covet,
But oh, for Israel's sake, I fain would leave
The earthly bauble, to a son of Saul.

JONATHAN.

Thy son would have thee wear it, while he lives.
I pray thee do not frown upon me so !

SAUL.

Oh, but I hate the smirking of a lie,
More than a lie in words. I do not love thee.

JONATHAN.

I know it ; but I love thee none the less,
And have been searching for thee, tho' I thought
That such would be my welcome.

SAUL.

Saw'st a boy
Run hereabouts, but now ?

JONATHAN.

One asked of me

Hast seen my father in the wood; and I
Said—bless thee lad, for I am seeking mine!

SAUL.

Nay, didst thou say so; didst thou seek me child?
I had not thought thy rev'rence went so far!
Come near me, boy; come, let me lean on thee,
Like the old tree of Ormuz on its branches.
I'm better now. Stay near me; counsel me.
The king that hath no friend—what boots his crown!
Like the poor stag, beset with hungry hounds,
That droops his towering head, and stands at bay,
He falls at last, mid rude alarm and noise,
For everywhere there is a fang for him!

JONATHAN.

Love, Prayer and Trust, these are my counsellors;
Old Samuel taught them to myself and David.

SAUL.

Out boy, enough! David and Samuel!
What sharper arrows could'st thou launch at me!
Job's comforter,—I'll lean on thee no more;
Go, I've a spear to lean on!

JONATHAN.

But for that,
Wilt throw away thy shield?

SAUL.

My spear's my shield;
Henceforth I'll lean upon it, till it pierces;
I've leaned on Faith too long.

JONATHAN.

Oh, say it not.

SAUL.

What's Faith, what's Prayer, I only ask for *men* !
 If to this issue it hath come at last,
 Be the last battle joined ! To war with God—

JONATHAN.

Is sure defeat !

SAUL.

Surrender is the same ;
 Nay, 'tis more triumph for mine enemy,
 And worse disgrace on me. Oh, in my soul,
 I feel how I could war, were I an angel ;
 One of those angels, excellent in strength.
 Man is but little lower—and i' faith,
 King Saul hath somewhat in him, more than man !

JONATHAN.

God grant it be not evil !

SAUL.

Jonathan,

Oh what a path, that closeth as he treads,
 And shuts out all retreat, the wretch doth take,
 That doth begin to wander from his God !
 I took that path betimes, and now, down, down,
 My very nature knows no point to stop,
 'Tis all down-hill, and there's a gulph below !
 Nay—I will stop : but then again 'tis—no.

JONATHAN.

Good angels help thee ! Pray God's grace, my father.

SAUL.

Nay, that's past praying.

JONATHAN.

'Tis a fit upon thee.

SAUL.

Fit ! Nay by Dagon, 'tis my strong intent,
On the thick bosses of his shield to rush,
And if I die, die there. I'll break, not bend ;
Give me but men ; ay, that's my only prayer,
I ask no more of heaven.

JONATHAN.

Hear him not

God of our fathers !

SAUL.

Out, away false boy,

I see all ambuscados in thy words,
All strategy, and all that's foul as Sathan.
My old suspicion is alive again ;
Don't follow me ; don't dog me i' the forest.

JONATHAN.

Stay, Canaan's curses were but light to mine ;
Oh take them off. Thou hast suspected me
Of crimes, I ne'er before did stain my soul,
To think might be. I'll offer sacrifice,
And pray thy malediction into nought,
For 'tis most cruel.

SAUL.

Ha! keep out my way!

I hear surrounding pother in the woods,
 And go to hunt a man. I read it all;
 The friend of David is no son of Saul.

[Goes.

JONATHAN.

Oh what a monitor is mind like this,
 Majestic, but in ruins! As I've seen
 A glittering necklace by mishap unstrung,
 So fall his many words; there is no thread
 To all his thoughts, though each doth shine a gem.

SCENE IV. *The highway in the wood, near Gibeah. A winding pass. Soldiers filing on, in companies. A flourish of trumpets; and enter Heralds, followed by the King, with attendants.*

HERALDS.

Ho, let the Hebrews hear—bow, bow the knee!

SAUL.

Now, Heralds cry the nearest hosts to arms.
 Bid them be gathered, at Saul's palm in Ramah,
 Harnessed for service. Have the priests forewarned
 We need their reverend counsel, at our court,

Before high noon. Sound trumpets, and cry war ;
The land is troubled by the traitor David.

HERALDS. (*Going.*)

Now, flourish trumpets—let the Hebrews hear!
God save king Saul—cry war—to arms, to arms !

[*They pass on.*]

SAUL.

Now is the conflict joined ; and this my crown,
Must in the battle, be—or lost, or won ;
The lot is cast into the lap : but I
Am bold to venture, if I throw the die.

[*Passes on.*]

*Soldiers pass on. Enter AHIMELECH, with Levites, and
ABNER, with attendants.*

ABNER.

Old Samuel comes no more to visit him.

AHIMELECH.

I met the prophet faring down apace,
From public haunts, unto his own abode,
To come no more. He spake few words to me,
But shook his hoary hairs, and looked prophetic,
The while his death-struck eye did oracle
More, than I ventured to demand in words.
Ah me, that I have lived to days like these !

ABNER.

Yet, reverend father, while poor Saul is king,
The unction that old Samuel poured on him,

Is, as the glitter of the Holy Ark,
A sacred presence, which we much surround.

AHIMELECH.

Was not the monarch given us in wrath?
Prithee remember !

ABNER.

Now thou triest me,
With cant of rebels ! Yet it is ordained ;
Perchance, indeed, because the land has lost
That simple charm of rural piety,
Which was our glory in the Judges' days ;
And GOD was wroth—yet he ordained the King.

AHIMELECH.

Keep that high spirit ever. Loyalty
Had saved the rebel angels. Let us haste.

[*They pass on.*

DOEG. (*Entering alone.*)

Now is the very flowering of my fortunes ;
And with the thrifty tillage I will give it,
What canker-worm shall blight my harvesting !
Now do I vow allegiance to myself ;
The soldiers have sequestered my poor farm,
My woman, and the younker : all I had,
Went in that last, curst war. So go, so come !
This war shall better my embarrassment ;
For 'tis in loyalty to be rewarded,
And I'll be loyal ever to king Doeg,
Hoping kind fate may swear the same allegiance.

Was ever such a lucky wight before,
That coming in the very notch of time,
I meet lord David with the priests at Nob,
Not knowing that he'd quarrelled with the king,
Till this good day : when, bless my natal stars,
Here, as I come, the bawling herald passes,
Yelling the music of a war against him,
And crying for his Where ! I'll to the king,
And tell him what I ken. But then, let's see
He'll catch him, and make peace ! It must not be,
The God of battles, is my only god,
Till Fate makes peace with me. I'll tease this war,
And sting his majesty with gnats, wherever
I find a place to bite. But where's the spot :
Oh, for some scar upon the lion's hide,
That's thin for puncture. What's the royal failing !
A god in height—from heel to helm a soldier,
Where is the crevice in his glitt'ring harness,
For Doeg's bodkin ! Now methinks I've got it !
That woman-chorus,—*Saul has slain his thousands*
And David his ten thousands—worried him.
Henceforth I'm musical ; I'll chance to hum it !
Be singing to myself as he comes nigh,
With some additions of convenient fancy ;
For there's the ulcer, there's the wincing-point ;
Was ever such a lively wit as Doeg's !
I'm made for something more : my grandame Huldah,
Now I remember, always told me so ;
Saul hanged her for a witch—a murrain on him,
And I'll avenge her death ! Yes, dear old mother,
I'll take thy vindication in my way,

To thy prediction—and appease thy blood,
 When it will help me towards thine augury!
 Eh, harkee boy, dost take me for an outlaw!

A cowherd enters.

COWHERD.

Now well-a-day, an if this isn't Doeg!

DOEG.

And if 'tis Doeg, carrion, answer him,
 Harkee, is't trouble here in Gibeah!

COWHERD.

Now peace be wi' us, since thou'st grown so grand;
 Is't Doeg asks for trouble? He was wont
 To love it better i' the bud, than blossom,
 And gave away the fruit. Now, prithee Doeg,
 How fared ye, when ye got us into ward,
 And made for Town-o'-Refuge! Eh, old Doeg!

DOEG.

Ha-ha! good joke—a most apparent joke,
 I've laughed at that—I've often laughed at that!
 'Twas a droll comick, marching into bale,
 Three stout rogues of you! I put off to Nob.

COWHERD.

Droll, say ye, coward! Oh, thou cheat and devil!

DOEG.

Ha-ha, old mate! Where's the king's palm in Ramah!
 The war is up; come, show me to the gathering.

COWHERD.

Beshrew me, but they'd think me a poor showman,
To bring them such a shabby ape as Doeg.

DOEG.

Now fellow, but I know thee for a fool,
Thou'dst throttle for that lie. But harkee, lad,
I've turned a warrior: want an armour-bearer,
And, if thou'lt serve, I spare thee for the nonce.

COWHERD.

Go steer thy cattle, cowboy! armour-bearer!
Ha-ha, dost think I'd carry goad for thee?
Beshrew me, for I'd point it on thyself,
And prick the donkey Doeg.

DOEG.

Sirrah, boy;
I tell thee clown, bear not thy jest too far!
The king pays well; I'll spare a groat for thee;
So, shew me to the court.

COWHERD.

He'll pay thee lashes,
Save thou hast news of David.

DOEG.

'Tis a bargain.
Dost think I'd prate thee lies about it, pritheer?
Sirrah, lead on: I meant to pay thee, clown.

COWHERD.

Come on! I see brave Doeg is the same,

And takes our sport, as when he followed kine !
 The king's gone by to Ramah. Have ye heard
 The latest tidings—how, the other day,
 His sons fell on him with a troop of men,
 Hard by the stone of Ezel ? Ten, he slew ;
 And Jonathan the prince was one that fell !
 I know it,—for they say so.

DOEG.

I, because
 I saw it with mine eyes. Lord David fled,
 On which I follow'd—look ye—till I took him !
 I'm laden with the story.

COWHERD.

Good as gold !
 A welcome home, old mate !

DOEG.

Come, come, make way,
 Lead on ; no help for Israel, if we stay.

SCENE V. *The palm-tree at Ramah, in Gibeah of Saul.*
The King in state beneath it, with a spear fixed in the
ground at his right hand. Attendants ; Chiefs of
Court and Camp.

SAUL.

I tax ye now with your ungratefulness,
 Old trusted friends, and brother warriors,

In that with Jesse's son ye have conspired,
 Against the sacred throne, the holy oil,
 And all the royalties of God himself,
 Which, his vicegerent indisputable,
 Saul must defend for Him. With Jesse's son,
 I tell ye, ye are leagued; and common secrets
 In rebel hearts, are as your sacrament,
 Conjuring all against the oracles,
 That thundered forth, my charter to the crown.
 Which of you proved my friend to tell me this,
 That Jonathan my son had stirred him up :
 That low-bred hind, whom I, too easy, trusted,
 Lodged in my palace, gave my royal daughter,
 Yea, and mine inmost self—and who, for all
 Is your ring-leader in disloyalty!

ABNER.

What means, my lord, the king!

ALL.

God save the king!

We have no king but Saul.

SAUL.

Oh, spare your breath,
 If but for death-bed prayer and penitence,
 So God in mercy grant ye beds to die on!
 Keep incense for your idols. Smell again
 What was your native element at first,
 And learn how rank through all bedizenments,
 Scent your new airs to me. Oh, how I hate

The white-washed, not new-wrought, adventurers,
 Who, nothing bettered by their court-attire,
 Wear their hereditary baseness, graven
 On the tough membrane of a coarse-grained soul,
 And treble-locked, like an ancestral patent,
 In their heart's core. Such cannot hide their natures;
 Fickle of purpose, grasping what is new,
 And desperate of good men's favour, look ye,
 They woo the rogue-rid rabble whence they sprung,
 Seeking the short-lived flowers, of forced promotion,
 From reeking dunghills, loathsome to their tillage,
 But rife with sprouts of fruit more savoury.
 Have I not told it all! I know ye, courtiers,
 And I believe ye'll fawn upon king Saul,
 Till some low partizan proves strong as he.
 Then cry God-save-thee, but I praise you not,
 And thank your servile homage not at all,
 But this good sword, and Him, by whom I reign.

ABNER.

Now, by the Holy Altar, 'tis good proof,
 That we are faithful, that we bear all this!

SAUL.

Outspoke the man of mettle, and the soldier!
 Abner there's soul in thee; I'd almost trust thee.
 Ye have no king but Saul, ye Benjamites,
 Nor shall ye soon; but, that ye would have David,
 Is more than old suspicion waking up.
 Oh foolish mob, would David give ye vineyards,
 Title ye captains, or adorn with dukedoms!

It must be that ye find no martial virtue,
No spirit of the battle-trumpet in you,
That ye would have this harping herd-boy here,
Twanging his chords—where I would wage campaigns.
Would ye might have your heart-full! Save that Saul,
Is not his own, in this vicarious power,
This moment would he doff the name of king,
And break the sceptre that he loathes to sway ;
Saul needs not such a bauble to be royal.
Go, learn his spirit, if ye dare adventure,
From Judah's lion, in his sultry walk,
And when he spares your gewgawed cowardice,
All princely as ye are ; what reck's that monarch
Of words ye call him, while his inbred nature
Is the high charter of his royalty,
Having a temper that is noble born,
Nickname him as ye will ! Go, fetch me David,
And I will dress him in this jewelled bonnet ;
And seat the puppet on my recent throne ;
And put the sceptre where the sheephook was ;
Ay, bow, myself, allegiance at his feet ;
And, in the kingly robes of self-regard,
Leave his plebeian majesty, less decked,
Less crown'd, less royal, in his state, than I
With your God-save-him, dying on my ear,
As to a better sovereignty I haste ;
The lone, calm island of my far-off mind.
Now, by the Brazen Serpent, 'tis a thought !
I would the rosy shepherd-boy were here ;
I'd give him title on the moment's spur,

And Israel then would have its wish at last,
 A King like other nations ; Egypt's lords
 Time out of mind, have been the Shepherd-Kings.

ABNER.

Oh my good sovereign and my general,
 Deal not unjustly with thy faithful servants,
 Who hold the name of Saul, a tower of strength,
 And pray that Israel's bulwark, long may stand.
 In that we know not where this David lurks,
 Thy starting-point for all this accusation,
 Lies the best proof that we are faithful men.
 Look, should we say the traitor is in Dan,
 In Hermon, or in Hareth, 'twould be well,
 To question him who owned so nice a secret,
 Lest he were wiser for copartnership.
 Now, if one jewel glitters in mine honour,
 On whose untarnished lustre I can dote,
 I bless the Lord, it is my loyalty.
 Yet, save your grace, 'twould seem some subtle savour
 Of tampering with traitors, might bested
 The knave, that would make harvest-home to-day,
 From yesterday's abetting in high-treason.
 But Abner, please your majesty, was ne'er
 One of those easy men without opinion,
 Whom enemies at least might hope to find,
 In hearing distance, of the golden bribes,
 Of which they whisper to the border-men.
 Bless God, my foes know well, how far I range
 Within the bounds of nice conformity,
 Which oft they over-step. My heart's, my tether,

And love the secret of my fealty.
 I can hate too, and in mine own degree,
 Hate, in as good proportion as king Saul ;
 And most I hate, your half-way honesty,
 Your friend, with reservations ; your step-brother
 By a left-handed marriage ; your ally,
 Whose shapely thorax doth o'er-arch a soul
 Of doubts and hesitations ; or in sooth,
 Your just spoiled angel, but unmoulded devil,
 Who loathes the skies, yet dares not league with hell,
 And hangs, one-handed, on the outside wall
 Of uncongenial heaven ; by Satan's self
 Unbeckoned to leap down.

ALL.

Amen to that ;

Take Abner's hate for ours.

SAUL.

Then deem me not
 The peevish friend I seemed. I take your love.
 True gold ne'er fears the fire ; and I've assayed ye,
 All dotingly, as finers blow the flame
 That proves the darling ore. I find no dross ;
 And in your melting hearts, I see my image,
 While thus your burnished honour, shines anew
 The mirrour of a majesty from God.

ALL.

Let the king live forever !

SAUL.

Thou my Abner,

Be ever my chief counsellor, and friend.
I mete no sounding to your depth of soul,
So claim your kin with Saul.

DOEG. (*In the distance.*)

But good my lord,
I cry your mercy that I dare to speak ;
God save the king—I said it loud as any,
God save king Saul !

SAUL.

But who's this vagabond !

DOEG.

Doeg—I cry your grace ; your chiefest herdsman :
God save the king !

ABNER.

If lungs were loyalty,
Your majesty might trust he comes a friend.

DOEG. (*Crowding nearer.*)

Oh yes your majesty—long live the king !
Not Abner's self, to-day, shall serve like Doeg.
I am the only man, 'pon oath, oh king,
Can tell you of the traitor.

ABNER.

Oh, for that
Thy looks are warrant ; and we doubt it not,
Thou face-denoted villain.

SAUL.

By thy looks,
Thou art a peddling bidder for reward ;

Whence didst thou steal such goodly merchandise,
If thou hast truth to sell!

ABNER.

Come, tell the truth,
A deed to brag of till you're hanged at last.
'Tis tenth of Adar—tell the truth to-day,
And keep it, for a festival, forever.

SAUL.

Yes, bring a dog into the royal presence,
But vent no lie. For fellow, we forewarn thee,
Though we believe thy features tell the truth,
Proclaiming they are all the truth about thee,
We'll buy thy wares; but if they show a flaw,
The tallest bough in Ramah shall be gibbet,
To swing thy scare-crow carcase from the Earth!

DOEG.

Nay then, on penalty of being hung,
And having this my body thrown to swine;
I have been hunting through this territory,
Far and anear, tracking the thankless traitor,
Till breathless, with spent hope, I came to Nob.

ABNER.

Oh, that's a most apparent lie, at once.
Look, he hath sandals, fresh as when he stole them,
No doubt from some fat lord, or chamberlain.

SAUL.

Ay, 'tis begun with bare-faced villany.
Tell out thy lies; but thou art dead already,

ABNER.

Take out the caitiff: hang him body-guards.

DOEG.

Oh, cry your grace, hang Doeg an thou wilt !
 Thou hast his equal in the camp for valour,
 But never saw'st his twin for strategem.
 Hang him—thou chokest a magazine of cunning !
 And what I have to tell, should save my throat.
 Who hangs a woman, waiting to give birth;
 Or one that's pregnant with the innocence,
 Of sweet infantile truth ! The truth I'd tell,
 Shall be as welcome as a first-born son,
 So thou wilt pay me, and I strangle not !

ABNER.

Then, please your majesty, we'll hear him lie.
 Dead wast thou with o'er-running ?

DOEG.

That's the word !

I bless your highness, dead—yes, that's the phrase ;
 Dead of my chasing, came I unto Nob,
 Where David, taking sanctuary, lurked
 Beneath the very curtains of the shrine.
 I saw him chew the shewbread like a heathen,
 And give it to his cut-throat followers :
 And priest Ahimelech was standing there,
 Hard by the candlesticks ; and wore his ephod,
 And held the loaves beneath it, dealing out
 The sacred food to traitors, flown with revel,
 And lewd with wine and women.

SAUL.

Where's he now,

This son of Jesse ?

DOEG.

That's the very thing ;
 I'm coming to it. Then the priest brought forth
 The spear that David, in the vale of Elah,
 Took of Gath's war-god, terrible Goliath,
 And prophesied 'twould frighten thee, and—

SAUL.

How ?

DOEG.

'Twould frighten thee ! And David said—God wot
 It frayed thee once before ; and all the world
 Had ne'er its equal.

SAUL.

Nay, he said not that ;

The harper does not lie.

DOEG.

'Tis but the half ;

Nor next, in proof he did rehearse that chorus,
 That Jacob's damsels trolled from their red lips,
 On his young triumph-day. Let's see ; I have it ;
Saul hath slain thousands, David—

SAUL.

Hold, enough !

Where's David now ?

DOEG.

Ask which way blows the wind.
Has he not been to Achish, king of Gath !

SAUL. (*To Abner.*)

What—joined with the uncircumcised—the rebel !
Thank God for that !

DOEG.

Nay, thank not, over soon ;
His name is terrible among the heathen,
As the remembrance of the seventh-plague,
To the whole race of Pharaohs. Ha—they said,
For you should know he feigned himself a madman,
Else they had chained him like another Samson ;
Look at his beard uncombed, his rolling eyes ;
'Tis Dagon smites him for his blasphemy.
The mothers scared their babies with his name,
And the unbreeched truant, crossed the way
To stare at him in safety ; ay, my lord,
But the fair heathen damsels pitied him,
Alas—they said—so sweet a youth should be
An exile from his fatherland, so long !
Is this the way they pay their champion ;
Is this the youth, for whom the Hebrews sung,
Saul slew his thousands—

SAUL.

Tell me in few words ;
Where lurks he now ?

DOEG.

Ay, sire—that comes anon.

They drove him forth from Gath; and ever since
 He hath been trav'ling-fellow of the breezes;
 Now was he prowling in a mountain-cave,
 Four hundred ruffians with him; next, they say,
 Bethinking of his blue-eyed grandmother,
 Ruth, the sweet gleaner, as the ballad goes.
 He posts to Moab, with his age-struck parents,
 And leaves them with its king. Then, back again,
 To lurk in Hareth's copsy fastnesses;
 I had it from a cowherd in the wood;
 This last may be a lie; but all of Nob,
 That I have told, I'll vouch with both my eyes,
 Is true as father Balaam!

ABNER.

Look, the king
 Has beckoned to the guards to choke your speech,
 Save ye shall tell at once, where lurks he now.

DOEG.

What—*now!*

SAUL.

Ay, now; disclose, or die the death.

DOEG.

Well—if you'll have the end, before the midst,
 They say, in Keilah, sire!

SAUL.

Hear that, my Abner,
In a fenced city! We have trapp'd the fox.
Some one go call the reverend Hierarch.

DOEG.

Ahimelech ?

SAUL.

Thou didst not think him nigh,
But I'll confront thee with an honest man ;
'Tis dangerous to lie so desp'rately.

DOEG.

I do suspect Ahimelech will lie !

*AHIMELECH enters, attended by Priests and Levites.*SAUL. (*Rising.*)

Most reverend father, bless your grace, to-day!
Came David e'er to Nob, whilst thou wast there ?

AHIMELECH.

Upon thy service once, my lord, oh king,
Came David thither, and I welcomed him,
As chiefest of thine honourable servants,
And with the princess wedded.

DOEG.

There—that's all.
Is't not enough ? There's no believing priests.

AHIMELECH.

My lord, I now first see this caitiff Doeg.

Let not his story be of any weight ;
The priest of God need not confront a fool.

ABNER.

Doeg, have silence.

SAUL.

Tell me, gentle priest,
How many others came with my dear David !

AHIMELECH.

Then—may it please the king—one sunny day,
As even-tide came on, and the oblation
Was gathering, one by one, the heavenly-minded,
Came David to the Holy Sanctuary,
But all alone, so that I feared some ill,
And said—what makes thee unattended, David.
On this, he warned me—'twas a secret errand
Of thine, oh king ; he must not tell his whither ;
And he had men without, that were an hungered,
And faint with travel. Give me loaves—said he.
I had the remnant of the Holy Bread,
Beneath my maniple, upon the patine,
And he besought me, if none other were,
To grant ev'n that, in such necessity,
And trust the tender mercy of the LORD.
To this, I asked if they were undefiled,
And pure of women : and he answered yes ;
And chiefly, as it was the remnant only,
And all his company were faithful men,
I gave them, and they ate. The God I serve
Shall judge me, if I wronged his mysteries.

SAUL.

But wherefore, didst thou prophesy for him,
 And give the rebel, scripture for his deed ?
 Yea, bless his traitor weapons, and invest
 The wretch, with relics of Jehovah's battles!
 Oh, perjured priest, thou art in league with him !

AHIMELECH.

Hast thou given ear to this ! I brought the prince,
 At his great need, out of the sacristy,
 Wrapped in an ephod, that enormous sword,
 Which he himself from great Goliath wrested,
 And bade him wield it, if 'twere possible,
 Since there was none beside.

SAUL.

How looked he on it !

AHIMELECH.

Like one who meets an old familiar friend ;
 And as he took it, eagerly he said,
 Give me my sword, its name is Nonpareil.
 How knew I of this feud ! Did I begin,
 For the first time, to pray for David then !
 Nay, all was ministered in innocence,
 As God shall judge my soul : for very oft
 Hath David to the daily service come,
 And, like the swallows 'neath the holy eaves,
 Hath made, as 'twere, a nest, within the courts
 Of the dear house of God. We parted then,
 He kneeling, for my blessing. All the while
 Lurked in the stuffs, where he had slept all day,

This cur of Edom ; and, when here I saw him,
I feared some tale of this less fool than villain,
Had come, for my accusing, to the king.

SAUL.

This villain's tale is twin enough to thine ;
Where is't they quarrel, Doeg !

DOEG.

Save his presence,
I always hate a priest ! Put Satan's self,
In a white ephod—which I do believe,
A rag of old idolatry withal ;
He could out-argue Moses' Pentateuch,
And prove you, mother Eve had tempted him.

ABNER.

Peace, thou dead dog ! 'Tis not, for such as thou,
To rail at God's invested minister,
Here, where religion is most honourable.

DOEG.

Oh, ay ; I meant no harm ; I like religion ;
But then I'd choose my own partic'lar priest,
Like father Micah—one o' the very salt
Of all the earth !

AHIMELECH.

Oh, here I stand and wonder,
That Israel's princes see the God of Aaron,
So, to the face, affronted in his servants !
Forgive them, gracious God !

SAUL.

This comes too late!

Set ye your house in order, sons of Levi!

Ahimelech, thou shalt most surely die.

DOEG.

Ask first, what 'twas, he set to solemn music,
And chaunted, 'stead of service!

AHIMELECH.

What new lie?

DOEG.

Thus went it;—I can't chaunt like Jubal's grandson;
Saul slew his thousands, David—

SAUL.

Out with them!

What, ho! my footmen, smite that smooth-faced priest!

ABNER.

What, this most rev'rend, and anointed head!
Oh, hear me—that a priest of God should be,
The martyr of this bastard's blasphemies!
Why, he doth lie by nature! Look at him!
That it should come to this! old Aaron's issue,
Bearded by such as he!

SAUL.

The holy Moses!

What stirs thee, Abner; what are priests to thee?
This pious wrath befits not men of sense;
Were not the reverend Phinehas and Hophni

True sons of Levi! Hath not many a wretch
 Black as the Serpent, been blest Aaron's issue!
 Prithee, art such a stickler for the mitre,
 That no man may be holy, save in linen!

ABNER.

Ay, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, sire,
 Those most sincere and venerable worthies,
 Were very holy, and the LORD was with them:
 At least—they said so.

SAUL.

Saul hath said the same,
 For once, in Gilgal, he did minister,
 Forced by the strong occasion; and again
 Occasion there may seem; for ere the morrow,
 One ancient line, of these, that vaunt their right,
 From Israel's altars, will I purge away,
 And their revenues will I give to men,
 That put the name of Saul into their prayers;
 The thing that priests were made for! Smite him, guards!

AHIMELECH.

A word, before I die! In many things,
 I, and my father's house, have sorely sinned,
 And let the LORD chastise us, as he may,
 Blest be His holy name! But, as for this,
 I am as stainless as the babe unborn;
 The LORD may work his purpose, in thy wrath,
 But thou shalt answer for this sacrilege,
 Oh pray—not with thy soul! From Eli's sons,
 So ne'er from Aaron's, let the priesthood pass,

Till great MELCHIZEDEK himself shall come,
 To hand the long succession, down from Him,
 Far, as the eye oracular can see.
 I do not covet for my hoary hairs,
 Their full maturing, in such evil days ;
 For, I forewarn thee, oh blood-guilty king,
 To-day, thy cup of vengeance shall run o'er,
 This crime, completing that first sacrilege,
 When Korah-like thou didst light up to God,
 Thine uncommissioned sacrifice, and sow
 The seed of yet incalculable sin !

SAUL.

Blaspheming priest ! Dost talk of sacrilege ?
 Thou, who didst give the Holy Bread to dogs !

AHIMELECH.

Worse things may sound as true, of better men,
 Whom God shall judge not guilty. Him, I trust,
 And to His court I do appeal my cause.
 Fall on me, guards ! the Lord receive my soul
 To Abraham's bosom !

SAUL.

Ha, rebellious priest,
 I'd slay thee, clinging to the altar's horns.
 What, ho ! my swordsmen, fear not for his robe !

GUARD.

Now, God forbid ! The servants of the Lord,
 Shall find no headsman here !

SAUL.

This plague is catching :
 Who's here, that is not frayed by daylight goblins !
 We'll purge this superstition from our soil.
 He flies ! a largess ! who will hew him down ?

DOEG.

Send me, oh king ! When ulcers can't be salved,
 The knife's your only doctor. Root and Branch !
 That is my watchword !

SAUL.

At them, faithful Doeg !
 Yes—Root and Branch ! leave not an ephod-wearer ;
 Fathers in God must be more pliant stuff,
 Or seek no milk from kings !

DOEG. (*Pursuing.*)

A Massacre !
 Slay all the priests ! no quarter !

SAUL.

Hear the hound ;
 He'll leave no blood of Aaron in the tribes !

ABNER.

The blest Ahimelech—preserve him God !
 That goodly blossom on the rod of Aaron ;
 That tallest cedar of our Lebanon ;
 Oh save him Lord, and shield thine Holy Ark !

SAUL.

A war with God, should break upon his priests !

I have set fire to stubble ; let it blaze.
 Chiefs, are ye lead, or marble ! Go your ways.
[They disperse in confusion.]

SCENE. VI. *Keilah.* DAVID, and ABIATHAR, *walking without, under the walls of the town. Hebron visible on a mountain, eastward ; the valley and stream of Zephathah between.*

DAVID.

Nay, thou art dreaming, stir thyself, my friend,
 Be wide awake, and say 'twas all a dream !

ABIATHAR.

If 'tis a dream, would God I might awake !
 For such a night of visions ne'er was known.

DAVID.

But hath the king no soul ! Is there no God !
 It cannot be ! This ancient tribe of Judah !
 The Holy One whom God did prove at Massah !
 The sons of Levi ! nay, forgive me, priest,
 But did I hear thee say it !

ABIATHAR.

Good, my Lord,
 Full fourscore ephods are as red with slaughter,
 As the stained raiment of the vintagers.

DAVID.

The High-priest's also !

ABIATHAR.

Oh, of Eli's house,
That dog of Edom hath left only me,
To burn away, like an expiring spark
Upon a hearth of ashes.

DAVID.

'Tis too strange !
So mighty, things contemptible can be ;
The mouse may gnaw the oak of ages down,
And Doeg write his name in chronicles,
By blotting out this rev'rend house in blood.

ABIATHAR.

And Nob, the priestly city, hath he giv'n,
To fire and slaughter.

DAVID.

Ephods are no armour,
And sacred things no fortress to a churl.
The dog may bark, where seraphs would be dumb,
And the mere ass, profane what heroes fear.

ABIATHAR.

I saw that Doeg fall on shrinking girls,
Children, and infants, and new-married brides,
Ay, and the wedded matron big with child,
Pleading with tears for her unbreathing babe,
And praying, as she knelt before the fiend,

With tones might melt lost angels. By the curls
Of their fair heads, all knotted in his fist,
He bent their comely necks, and as he reaped,
Tossed them to wind and sun, to batten vultures.

DAVID.

Oh, where was I, with my six hundred, then!
How fell thy rev'rend father? tell me all.

ABIATHAR.

One told me, as I flew to succour him,
The hoary patriarch was dead already,
And that, like Abel's sacrifice, the altar,
Was sprinkled with his blood. From Ramah thus,
It seems, he fled unto the sanctuary,
And, with the gates unbarred, began to chaunt
The evening litanies, with incense-fumes,
When Doeg entered, panting after him,
His reeking sword in hand. On this, my father,
Kneeling, did cover his anointed head
With his pontific robes—which Doeg cleft,
He, all the while, imploring unto God,
For Shiloh's sake, forgiveness for king Saul!

DAVID.

Abiathar, look yonder; one is coming
From Hebron hither, and he runs in haste,
Perchance with better story: beckon him!

ABIATHAR.

He sees us! May it prove some second tidings,
To heal the wounds of former! Pray the LORD,
My father lives—to bless me ere he die!

DAVID.

Nay, he doth bear the badge of Jonathan ;
 One of the household servants ! Let us wait,
 He crieth tidings.

ABIATHAR.

May it be, that God
 Hath spared his servant, my most rev'rend father !
 For I beheld it not ; one told me, only.

Enter runner.

DAVID.

Speak, in the name of God ! thou bringest news !

RUNNER.

That, Jonathan, thy brother, loves thee still,
 And warns thee hence, betimes !

DAVID.

And Saul, my master ?

RUNNER.

Posteth this way, with all his men of war.
 One Doeg, that was herdsman heretofore,
 Hath told thy whereabouts ; and, good my Lord,
 Though, until now, we thought this fellow fool,
 He hath transformed himself, as in an hour,
 To place and riches ! He hath slain the priests,
 And boasts for martial prowess, his foul crime ;
 Whereat, I grieve to tell, king Saul himself
 Hath given him large reward, and taken him
 Into his nearest guard. Oh, shame to say it,

The wretch, that slew the priest Ahimelech,
Is body-servant to the Lord's Anointed !

ABIATHAR.

Art sure the High-priest is, already, dead ?

RUNNER.

Dead, and dragged out to vultures ! In the way,
But yester-night, I found his sacred body,
Three gashes on his venerable breast,
And, on his head, a scar. I frayed away
A vampire, that was hovering over it,
And cast three handfuls of the earth upon it,
For I was much in haste.

ABIATHAR.

I bless thee, lad ;
Thou hast giv'n burial to a priest of God,
And he will pay thee wages. But return,
And find the body, with me ; we must lay
The High-priest, in a fitting sepulchre,
If yet his rev'rend body may be found.

DAVID.

Nay, give that charge to me. Abiathar,
My sin hath come upon my head, at length,
For, there at Nob, eaves-dropping Doeg lurked,
And heard my feigned words, before thy sire ;
For which, all this befalls thy house and thee !
The Lord forgive me ; but to thee, my lord,
I make all rev'rence, in his holy fear,
As Aaron's next successor. Thou, with me,

Shalt tarry, while this warrant seeks thy blood ;
And, by thy hand, e'en now, would I enquire,
Where God would bid us flee. Thy consecration
May yet be duly ordered ; but meanwhile,
It doth suffice, that all of Aaron's line,
Are born with their anointing ! Go, good runner,
And let the Hebrews know—how God hath saved,
The Holy Urim, and pontific ephod ;
And the next heir of Levi,—still to bless
His people in his name, and on his Altar,
To burn the incense of their gratitude ;
When first, with holocausts, their penitence,
Hath risen to God, imploring 'gainst the blood,
That, for his vengeance, crieth from the ground !

ACT II.

SCENE I. *Gibeah of Saul. Time, the early morning.*

ABNER *alone.*

ABNER.

I dreamed last night, but now
The vision has passed o'er.
And yet, methinks, there was an angel in it,
Lamenting over Saul ;
And shading, with his hand,
His over-flowing eyes,
As loath to leave, yet grieved away ;
While many voices cried,
Let us depart from here.

But still the angel bending,
Watched, o'er the slumbering King ;
While a green serpent gliding in,
Menaced the glittering wings he wore,
Nor seemed to threat in vain :
For, that blest chamberlain,
Like a deposed servitor, did stand,
By sufferance only there :
And, how the scene disclosed,
I cannot think—for now,
The vision has passed o'er.

Jonathan enters.

JONATHAN.

Good morrow, noble Abner. Is it truth,
The prophet Samuel comes to us no more ?

ABNER.

Too true, my gentle prince. I would to God,
It were as strange, as true.

JONATHAN.

But, is't not strange ?
When did my royal father need him more !

ABNER.

Thine eyes are over filial, my dear son.
They wonder now, because when others saw,
Love made them passing blind.

JONATHAN.

It cannot be,
The holy man is grieved !

ABNER.

Long-suffering seer !
He hath been always grieved ; but grieved away
He cannot be, from Saul. But now, 'tis said,
The very oracle forbids him more,
To counsel our poor king.

JONATHAN.

A cruel tale ;
Why should such rumour be ?

ABNER .

I tell thee, prince,
 Though, to none other, would I prate my fears,
 Counsel hath been, too oft, despised of Saul,
 To be vouchsafed, unwelcome as before.

JONATHAN.

These are harsh words, from Saul's most trusted friend!

ABNER.

The king's most trusty servant, rather say ;
 For, when the trial comes, I tell thee, child,
 The king shall find I can dispute for him,
 As now, before him, for the Holy Ark,
 I venture to contend. Our blest Religion
 Hath come, in this dull age, to be despised ;
 And that, which in the glorious hall of heaven,
 Doth most ennobled flaming seraphim,
 Is talked of, as the attribute of women,
 Of babes, and nurses—not of martial men.
 As if the swords that won this Canaan for us,
 Were not, each morning, consecrate with prayer ;
 As if, our warlike fathers, learn'd not courage
 By fearing only God ; as if—the Faith
 Were not, above mere reason's faculty,
 Man's best peculiar ; and most eminent,
 Of all, that lifts him o'er the vulgar brute !
 I tell thee, my old-fashioned reverence
 Can hardly brook the puppy breed of men,
 Whelped, by these times, into the breathing world,
 Who scarcely bow their curl-befangled heads,

When fashion brings them to the sanctuary ;
 For, with the like—may father Jacob rest
 Deaf, in his sepulchre, while I pronounce it ;
 With such—it is contemptible, forsooth,
 To own they have a soul ;—or, at the most,
 To shew a spirit, not above the love,
 And holy fear, of God !

JONATHAN.

I would, good Abner,
 Thine honest indignation might confound
 These intellectual eunuchs of our age,
 Shewing, how mean and paltry, they have made
 The things, their mothers, when they gave them names,
 Must have designed for men !

ABNER.

In better days,
 There was an homage writ in every soul,
 And deepest graven in the nobler sort,
 Which now is smoothed away; and holy rites ;
 And tributes, native in the human heart ;
 Which true religion nurtures, as the sun
 Matures good seed, from blossoms into fruit ;
 Are rooted up, or chilled : till God, at length,
 Is each man's graven image, in the fancy ;
 A thing as weak, poor, fickle, and supine,
 As the mere humour of his worshippers,
 Would choose their God to be.

JONATHAN.

I learned, my lord,
To moralize, as thou dost, very young ;
For good old Samuel was my catechist ;
And, as I grow in years, it deeper sinks
Into my very heart, that I should be,
In such an uncongenial climate born,
Of spiritual cold ! For, everything
I most admire, doth cross the grain of others ;
And what, from principle, I dare to do,
Restoring ancient modes of piety,
Makes others stare, and call it my conceit ;
When, before God, it is deep-working thought,
And high resolve to bless another age,
While this one crushes me. For, noble Abner,
Hast thou not marked, what in itself is good,
Though laughed at, when the good espouse it first,
Is, to the after-age bequeathed down,
All ven'erable and ancient, with their names !
Now, let the poor, short-seeing, mob of men
Laugh on, and have the echo for their cheer ;
But we, will live our lives, for future days ;
Content to know, that though despised of fools,
We, in communion with the noble dead,
And, with applause from viewless ministers,
Ay, with the strengthening smile of God himself,
Do hold, in his high service, our still way,
Having within us, all our journey through,
And, in his home at last, our high reward !

ABNER.

Thou genial scion, of a leafless bough,
 Would the same vital sap of holiness,
 Watered thy sire's cold heart !

JONATHAN.

Oh Abner, Abner,
 It is not equal, Saul alone should bear,
 The burden of his times !

ABNER.

The ways of God,
 Are ne'er unequal : when the people err,
 Let princes ponder lest they lead the way.
 At Gilgal first, old Samuel's eye grew stern
 Upon king Saul, oracular of ill ;
 For there, he did enact Abiram's crime,
 And play old Korah o'er. Again, at Gilgal,
 That day when Agag perished, 'twas a scene,
 I would a loyal spirit might forget !
 Thou knowest that mis-invented pomp at Carmel,
 The pillar, Saul set up, to tell the world,
 Of Amalek's defeat—and Israel's !

JONATHAN.

Oh say not Israel's ! Yet, I know somewhat,
 Thy meaning, in that slur. Tell out the whole ;
 What of that trophy ?

ABNER.

Oh, the fearful God,
 Sent Saul, to be his whirlwind, 'gainst his foes,

And did forbid him spare of Amalek,
 Woman, or suckling : nay—he must not leave
 Of herd, or stall, one sacrificing sheep,
 For Amalek was curst! I served, that day,
 Next captain of the host : and did exclaim,
 When, through our charging lines, the mandate flew,
 To spare the best of that forbidden spoil,
 And slay the vile alone. But God was good,
 And blighted not our triumph, in the flush,
 Whatever, to the fruit, shall yet betide.
 At Carmel then, as we to Gilgal passed,
 Laden with spoil, that trophy was set up,
 And, on we went, driving our stolen herds,
 The good old Samuel hastening on our track.
 Oh, I remember, when he was arrived,
 His eye was foretaste of what God's shall be,
 And, at the look, the king's proud height did crouch,
 As, heart in throat, he yet assumed to smile,
 And said—most reverend Father, it is done ;
 I have, in all things, wrought the Lord's behest !

JONATHAN.

Poor father!—how did Samuel answer him ?

ABNER.

How!—with a glance that might beseem the voice
 Which walked the happy garden, and to light,
 Dragged recreant Adam from his skulking-place !
 For, all the while, the very herds did bleat
 Our heavy accusation to the skies :
 And—deep old man ! methinks I see him now,

Turning his grey old head, a moment first,
With finger raised, to catch the tell-tale sounds ;
He answered, to the very soul of Saul,
What meaneth, then, this lowing in mine ears !
On which, the king pretended zeal for God,
And, that, the choicest spoil was but reserved
For a burnt sacrifice !

JONATHAN.

It must have been so ;
Say not, I pray thee, 'twas pretended only.

ABNER.

What if it were so ? This will-worship, son,
Is the foul itch of our distempered days ;
And things, all pious in themselves, are done
In lieu of things commanded ! Who demurs,
Must hear a Babel brawling after him,
And bear the names of Churl, and Infidel !
All this, in one strong sentence, Samuel showed,
Responding—But obedience doth out-burn
The fat of rams ! And then, alas, he added,
Because presumptuous Saul rejecteth God,
God hath rejected him ! 'Tis this, I say,
A loyal heart would fain forget for aye.

JONATHAN.

A filial heart can't bear it. Was there not
Some tempering *If*, to so severe a curse ?

ABNER.

If Abner heard none, there is none to hope ;

For then, the prophet tore the royal robe,
And said—Ev'n so, the realm is rent from thee !

JONATHAN.

It may be, God will let sweet mercy's flood
Rise high enough, to wash ev'n this away !

ABNER.

But, that red stain at Nob !

JONATHAN.

Oh, name it not ;
The blood of Levi crieth from the ground,
And Aaron's God hath not an idol's ear !

ABNER.

Our cup of vengeance trembled to its brim,
And these red drops ran o'er. One crime, it was,
In embryo, and in stature. First behold,
With paltry pretext of necessity,
A self-ordained priest ; and next in course,
A bold will-worship, offered to the Lord
With mouthing piety. And, last of all,
A massacre of the anointed line,
Hath set the head-stone on this pile of sin ;
As if the Lord, whose judgments sleep awhile,
Had not seven thunders to let loose, at length,
Upon the builders of this Babylon !

JONATHAN.

I tremble, Abner. 'Tis the hour of prime ;
Come, importune the Lord, for Israel's peace !

Perchance, it is because our prayers grow faint,
These thunders mutter. Prayer may still prevail.

SCENE II. *Gibeah of Saul. The Throne-room in the palace. The King in state. ABNER, MERODACH, and courtiers.*

SAUL.

The cunning game has slipped our trap at Keilah,
But this strange fellow boasts he brings me news :
My lords, I'd be alone with him. Retire ;
And, good my Abner, prithee, guard the door.

[They retire.]

Who art thou Merodach !

MERODACH.

I'm Merodach,
If one must wear a name ; It matters not,
Some call me Evil Merodach : all's one !
It's meaning's rather bitter.

SAUL.

Art thou bitter ?

MERODACH.

Yes, when ye press too hard.

SAUL.

SAUL.

Like poison fruit,
But not so tempting in exterior !

MERODACH.

Have done with this !

SAUL.

Thou speakest, awful man,
Like Balaam, son of Beor, come to life ;
And if thou cam'st not in the name of friend,
I'd beard, and slay thee, for that speech of thine.
I know thy name : now tell me, fellow, further,
If thou hast any breeding and profession,
What may'st thou be ?

MERODACH.

Thine enemy, king Saul,
If thou inquirest more.

SAUL.

Now, by the Ark,
I'll squeeze thy bitter gall the more, for that ;
Thy name tells only part, though, I believe it,
There's something in a name.

MERODACH.

A bitter moral
Is at the core of mine : so, crack it's bark,
And keep the kernel to remember me.

SAUL.

Thou bare-faced quibbler, out upon thy wit !
Omnipotence shall scarce speak thus to me !

Yet tell me further, ere I choke thee, villain,
Thy whence and whither.

MERODACH.

Oh, be modest King,
Thy question apes Omnipotence itself,
And I will answer thee, like Lucifer ;
From wandering up and down upon the Earth,
And walking to and fro !

SAUL.

Well-mouthed, Sathanas !
Why, Merodach, how well thou ap'st the devil !
Hast thou considered then, my servant David,
A very perfect, and most upright man,
And that escheweth evil !

MERODACH.

Ha, poor king,
Why, thou mere mortal, how thou mockest God !

SAUL.

Art more than mortal, Merodach !

MERODACH.

Ha-ha !
How my assurance tames thy mettle down !

SAUL.

Thou'rt an immortal devil, I believe.

MERODACH.

Ha-ha !

SAUL.

SAUL.

That was a hollow laugh.

MERODACH.

And at

A hollow heart, king Saul !

SAUL.

Incarnate devil,

Kings are not made to be brow-beaten so !

I do conjure thee by the Holy One,

Tell me, who art thou !

MERODACH.

By Philistina's gods,

There is no thunder in that name, from thee !

Unhappy Saul, the Holy One, thou know'st,

Fights not upon thy side.

SAUL.

Who dares say that !

MERODACH.

Go, scare the crowd with looks of majesty ;

But Merodach, that reads thine inmost soul,

Ay, sounds its deep, thou puny autocrat,

Down to its rotten core—will laugh at thee,

And, by the leave of Him thou hast defied,

Tosses thy curses back ! The strength of God

Dwells with the souls that love Him—not with thine !

And I, who have thy proud-heart's master-key,

Know—what thou know'st—thine utter poverty,

And—spite of this feigned pomp—thine emptiness !

SAUL.

LORD, hath it come to this! Curs't Merodach,
 Don't take this colour on my cheek for fear,
 Nor dream I turn my eye! I only burn,
 Wince—turn—am in a fever, by the gods!
 Not used to hear such talk—to know what pains,
 Of fire, or faggot, rack, or stones, or gibbet,
 Shall score away thy fearful reckoning!
 Thou'rt running up a terrible account,
 Letting thy tongue thus spit upon thy king;
 But speak all out—belch forth thy venom, Sir,
 The dregs of bitterness, if that's thy name!

MERODACH.

Soft, monarch, roar not so. Thou art a lion!
 A boy of Beth'lem tore a lion once,
 A-piece-meal on the wold! Thou art a lion,
 But David can do over that strong feat,
 If I befriend thee not.

SAUL.

Out, fool! what's David?
 And what art thou to me!

MERODACH.

Look on me, Saul,
 I know thee, through and through. So, waste no words;
 I'll tell thee all thy questions, one by one,
 For I do pity thee, thou wreck of power!
 My name—is but a fancy—and a shade
 Of evil yet to come; 'tis naught to thee:
 My Whence is from the northward; and my Whither

Is at thy service, if thou'lt choose to bid.
 My business, is to make thee faithful tender,
 Of limb and sinew, heart, and soul, and fortune,
 For this long warfare. Wilt thou take me, king ?
 I'll serve thee—but I'll answer thee no questions !
 Naught that is daring, will I not adventure ;
 Nothing that's possible for flesh and blood,
 Is an Impossible for Merodach !
 Only, it is impossible for him,
 To tell the secret of his history,
 Or be a butt for questions. Wilt thou have me !
 If nay—take one good look at thy worst foe ;
 If ay—command my duty as thou wilt,
 But ask me nothing more.

SAUL. (*Measuring with his eye.*)

There's service in thee !

Thou hast strong thighs—broad shoulders, and thy name
 Is Merodach.

MERODACH. (*Going.*)

Ay, Merodach Saul's foe.

SAUL.

Nay, I've not said it. I have need of thee ;
 I choose to keep the devil in my pay !
 But let me mutter o'er thy name awhile ;
 'Tis harsh as prickly apples to the palate,
 And then, there's something crooked in thine eye.

MERODACH.

Then spare thy mouth a pricking—and mine eye

Shall trouble thee no more! But know, I leave thee,
To chew the food of asses—thistles, sire!

[*Going.*

SAUL.

Stay—stay!

MERODACH.

And be a trifle?

SAUL.

Merodach,

I tell thee should another speak to me,
As thou hast ventured, he should have no tongue
To take his leave of life. I fear thee not;
But I do feel most strangely bound to thee;
And Merodach, ev'n in thine awful name,
There is a magic that enchaineth Saul;
I said 'twas rough, and yet I love to speak it.

MERODACH.

Thou speakest it, too much. Have done—I'll leave thee.

SAUL.

Nay, hold!—to say its rugged consonance
Moves more the soldier, than 'twould charm a maid,
Is, for a warrior, no poor courtesy;
My men speak so of mine.

MERODACH.

Have done with talk,

And say thy will at once!

SAUL.

Didst ever, then,
Meet with the priest Ahimelech, at Nob!

MERODACH.

Never at Nob. But in the highway, king,
I saw his body, where thy ruffian hand
Had stretched a priest of God.

SAUL. (*Drawing.*)

Thou lookest like him,
And, by the Ark, I'll send thee where he is!

MERODACH. (*Drawing.*)

Back! tempt me not! Saul feared not holy oil,
Nor shall his royal unction handcuff me.
I'll strike thee—or obey thee—as thou wilt.

SAUL. (*Sheathing.*)

Daylight hath bugbears grosser than the dark;
And I'll not fight with phantoms! Merodach,
Dream not I fear thy blustering villany,
Though I have called thee fearful. Any sin,
Is fearful in remembrance; and if 'twere
A sin to slay those priests, thou bring'st it freshly
To a most tender conscience—that's thy secret.
I choose thine offer: Take my hand—'tis done!
But if I sometimes look awry upon thee,
Mind not the trick of Saul. Ahimelech,
Before I slew him, looked a twin to thee,
Save there was something priestly in his visage,
And more of heaven. But yet I do believe,

By this time, in that most abhorrent world,
To which I sent him for his blasphemy,
Being a demon, and no more a priest,
His ghastly eye-ball hath a glare like thine !

MERODACH.

Ha ! 'tis a joke ; Saul smiting down a priest
For blasphemy, good sooth !

SAUL.

Ay, blasphemy ;
He did blaspheme the shew-bread.

MERODACH.

Asmodai !
And thou, full oft before a holier thing ;
But he was a poor priest—and thou art king !

SAUL.

Who dares say that ?

MERODACH.

I heard thee !

SAUL.

'Tis a lie !

MERODACH.

Thou didst adventure on a war with God ;
Perchance He hath joined issue.

SAUL.

Satan then,
Hath furnished me a fit recruit in thee.
Canst hear my thoughts, thou wizard !

MERODACH.

Conscience, king

Makes mites a miracle! I said not so;
 But thou didst walk the forest, t'other day,
 Talking to winds, and spiders, daring things!

SAUL.

And David skulking in the thicket heard,
 And prated to the priests; and they to thee?
 Is this thy secret?

MERODACH.

Have it so, my lord,
 But name not David—for I hate the harper,
 Worse than Goliath's widow.

SAUL.

What to thee,
 Is that poor stripling, pritheer?

MERODACH.

Is he not,
 The foe of God's anointed! Am not I
 Henceforth, Saul's plighted ally! Hear me make
 The oath that binds me: Right, I question not,
 Wrong, never heed; I am no more my own;
 Saul's foes are my foes: witness it, ye gods!
 From this day forth, I'm Saul's for right or wrong!

SAUL.

I like that temper. Let me but explain,
 That my blaspheming, is a phrensy-fit,
 Which awkwardly o'er-takes me, unawares:

While in my heart, I am the Lord's avenger
'Gainst all blasphemers—chiefly 'gainst this David.

MERODACH.

I beg thee, make no peace with that same harper.

SAUL.

Thou speak'st my own resolve. I loathe the knave,
Yet was he skillful, in my malady,
And so, I said, play on.

MERODACH.

'Twas all a juggle.
Myself shall soothe thee more, with rougher words ;
And then I have an herb, named adder's-wort,
That lulleth madness like a witch's charm.

SAUL.

Eh ! now I learn thy breeding, Merodach,
For, by thy skill in simples, thou'rt a leech !

MERODACH.

Yes—I've ta'en blood, and given men their deaths.

SAUL.

Harkee, dost hear a brawling there without ?
Tarry a moment. Ho ! Lord Abner, open.

[Goes.

MERODACH.

Ha-ha ! leech, say ye ? Call me fisherman ;
There is a hook within thy jaws, poor king ;
But thou shalt swim thy tether's length, for fun !
Poor Eve, that poison apple tainteth yet

Thy noblest children ! What but disobedience
 Could eat the core out of a heart, like his,
 And let the swaggering bully I have been,
 So toss and crush it, in my daring paw !

SAUL returns with ABNER.

SAUL.

Where are those Ziphites that attended thee ?
 Wilt bid them hither, honest Merodach !

MERODACH. (*Muttering.*)

Honest ! I earn new titles, with new work ;
 Bid Ziphites—that's a service !

(*Aloud.*) Ay, my lord.

[*Goes.*

SAUL.

Now where was this bespotted leopard caught,
 This lithe and cat-like monster of a man !
 Abner, for love's sake, give me counsel, now,
 Lest his affection prove a bear's rude hug,
 From which I would excuse myself betimes.

ABNER.

When Doeg meets me,—I forget the day,
 An hour ere Sabbath-eve, if I remember,
 He brings this churl along. It seemed indeed
 A showman bringing in a savage bear,
 As he proclaimed him, from the northward somewhere ;
 He said, methinks, from Endor. Then, he winked
 To let me know him for a precious knave,
 Come from what parts he might. From all, I gathered .

The sly surmise that he had been a robber,
 But now would wipe away his outlawry,
 By service in this war. Believe it then,
 He'll make a battle-horse, if strongly bitted ;
 But when the war is over, break his mettle,
 Or he will break our own.

SAUL.

I'll rein him tight !
 The greatest marvels ope, with little keys,
 And thy surmise, unlocks this rascal's all.
 I'll wager thee, he proves some recreant Levite,
 Half-brother to the priest Ahimelech,
 Ahitub's bastard—some such blood as that ;
 For there's a household likeness ; and he mouthed
 Compunctiously, of slaying that poor priest !
 We'll hoard this secret, till it best shall serve.

ABNER.

Did Doeg first make mention to the king,
 Of Michal's marriage ?

SAUL.

By the gods, he did :
 Did ever devil work so sweet a wound ?
 Dost see,—the traitor was my royal son,
 So long as he could call my daughter wife ?
 But wedding her to Phalti, dropped him down,
 To his own dung-hill once again ! 'Twas Doeg !
 And I could curse myself for lacking wit,
 Before this limb of Sathan elbowed me !

A B N E R .

Ha-ha ! ye had it at the second hand ;
 For Merodach was master to ye both,
 In this discipleship of sacrilege.

S A U L .

I marvelled if 'twas Doeg's stratagem ;
 So then, he owns he learned it of this knave !

A B N E R .

And more, this knave hath posted Doeg off,
 With sword and buckler, and a purse of money,
 To some odd tenants of the wilds of Ziph,
 Outlaws of course,—of which he may be chief,
 With orders to engage their desperate help,
 To catch the refugee ! The scout is gone ;
 But, by their looks, these Ziphites that await thee,
 Should be themselves the gang.

S A U L .

'Twas modest worth,
 That he should never name these services ;
 And I surmise, this rogue is one of those
 Who foil great merit, with forbidding show.
 But here he comes ! Look, Abner—look at him !
 Ahimelech's twin-brother to a hair !

(Enter MERODACH with the Ziphites.)

A B N E R .

He hath a serpent in his eye ! Come hither,
 Ye men of Ziph, the king hath work to do.

ZIPHITE.

Oh, let the king come down with us himself !

ANOTHER.

Ay, and we'll catch these filthy birds for him,
In their foul nest : they've built it in our forest.

SAUL.

How many men hath David ?

ZIPHITE.

Twice five hundred.

SAUL.

I'll take five score and fall upon them, then !

ZIPHITE.

God save the king ! 'Twill take a score of hundreds ;
For, holy Moses ! we must tell the truth,
He can draw men, from forest and from field,
Two thousand, at a word !

SAUL.

Out with it, then !

The worst at once ; how many thousand more ?

ZIPHITE.

Let Cherith's ravens croak. We would not take
Their native office, or distress our king
With numbering traitors.

SAUL.

Poh—I need but you,

With such true hearts, to quench a hell of treason !

ZIPHITE.

They are strong soldiers sire—and desperate ;
We are too few—

SAUL.

But hold, forget not Saul !
How many thousands will the presence count
Of God's Anointed, 'gainst these summer flies !
But that's my part to know. I bless ye all,
Ye men of Ziph ! 'Twill save your summer corn,
To drive these locusts out. Go, catch me David ;
They tell me that he dealeth subtilly,
And I'll not track the forest, like a dog
After a fox's skin. Go, bring me word,
And so my army here, against that time,
Needs not my conduct to Philistine fields,
I'll take a handful, captain them myself,
And punish this small out-break. Go your ways,
Let the straw smoke ; I'll crush it ere 'twill blaze.

[Goes out with Abner.]

ZIPHITE.

A mighty man !

ANOTHER.

He counts it naught to him !

MERODACH.

Ho, Ziphites—I've a word before ye go,
Hark, to the forest, fellows—hillo, Ho !

SCENE III. *In the wood of Ziph. An opening, with close thickets in the back-ground. Time, Night; the moon shining. Outlaws enter.*

OUTLAW.

Here, stand! both the young lords are somewhere near;
Take them alive; we're three to two, and stronger,
And Doeg pays us well for skirmishing.
Look well to right and left! they're no fool's foe!

ANOTHER.

The more's the sport—come on!

ANOTHER.

Nay, 'tis not time;
We'll tarry till the moon is higher up;
A Paschal-moon, that likes not deeds like this!

ANOTHER.

Come lily-liver, whine not to the moon!
Draw your good blades; let moon-light flash on them;
And follow, comrades!

ANOTHER.

Hist! but who is here?
Here comes a body!

ANOTHER.

Poh—old grandmama!

DOEG, *enters disguised as an old woman.*

DOEG.

Nay, nay, good fellows, don't you know me ? Doeg !

OUTLAW.

Befitting raiment ! Armour were disguise
For such as thou, good Doeg !

DOEG.

Ha, good luck !

I've put it on, for val'rous purposes ;
Both the young rogues, are coming hereabouts,
I heard it from a spy. So let me be,
I pray you, till I hear what they will say ;
And, when I whistle—then, rush in on them ;
But don't fall foul o'me !

OUTLAW.

Fall foul of thee !

There's no mistaking thee for gentlemen ;
Have no misgivings, mother !

DOEG. (*Softly.*)

There they come !

OUTLAW.

Hist, and to cover, fellows ! prithee, there,
Good mistress, Doeg, please go hide with them ;
I'll take the manage of the ambush, please ye !

They stand aside ; and JONATHAN enters.

JONATHAN.

Ha ! here's the place. It minds me of old times,

How here we sat, and talked of wars with Gath,
 His spirit ever, like th' archangel's, waging
 Eternal warfare 'gainst the Infidel !
 Here too he poured his song : and then he seemed
 Like ancient Enoch, in his whirlwind car,
 To mount the clouded firmament with steeds,
 That winged the winds, with his translated soul,
 And left me, far below ; o'er-joyed to catch
 Some falling token from his flaming way !
 Oh, his the unction of that sacred gift,
 That, shed from God upon the perfect man,
 Gives ev'n perfection lustre ; opes the heavens
 To the bold pinion of his ardent thought ;
 And sends him venturing 'mid brighter worlds,
 Like a young seraph, whose abode is light,
 Preluding high on his ethereal way,
 The symphony to heaven's great choral-song.
 Why comes he not ? Shine gently, faithful moon,
 That now maturing towards the Paschal-time,
 Dost, with a holy quiet, sail the air,
 And walk the skies, in loneliness with God !

DAVID. (*Entering.*)

Before me, Jonathan ! I trust, not long !

JONATHAN.

For once, before thee ! Here's our dear old haunt,
 And here's thy brother's heart !

DAVID.

But spies abound :
 And night has ever been the outlaws' noon !
 Is't quiet here ?

JONATHAN.

List, not a leaf a rustling :
Would 'twere as peaceful everywhere in Israel !

DAVID.

Then let us talk, for we must part to night,
God only knoweth, when to meet again !

JONATHAN.

Nay, art thou desperate so soon, my David !
Remember, 'tis but phrensy, in my father,
That makes these days so dark. . Anon, will prayer,
And holy trust prevail o'er Sathan's wiles,
And thou shalt be recalled, with recompense,
Like a returning sunlight, after rain.

DAVID.

Ah, might those happy days return once more,
When I had power from God to heal thy father,
Routing, with minstrelsy, his viewless foes,
And to his soul, recalling with sweet sounds,
Its ministers of grace ! Oh, then I thought,
The highest seraphim had special charge
Of his great spirit. Like a Lebanon,
Disrobing of its clouds, he reared his head,
And, like a fount in spring-time gushed, his heart,
And he, half-babe, half-angel, was himself !
It might be so, once more.

JONATHAN.

And shall be, David,
Though first, thou may'st be tried as in a furnace,

For one, named Merodach, hath newly come,
As 'twere into thy place, and beckons him
To all that's evil. He will hunt for thee ;
And yet thou shalt prevail. Oh, therefore brother,
I pray thee, in the battle, spare my father !

DAVID.

Am I a heathen to be prompted thus !

JONATHAN.

I do not prompt, but pray thee. Thou'lt be tempted,
For, must I tell thee, even at me he threw
His javelin once, because I loved thee well ;
He's up in earnest : Swear to me, my David,
Thou ne'er wilt harm him ! Shame upon my tears,
But oh, his dear gray hairs are doubly dear,
Now, when they thicken o'er a mind diseased !

DAVID.

Were I a dog, thou wouldst not use me worse !
The hungry wolf, will spare a broken king,
And need I promise to revere king Saul !
That shining mirror of true majesty ;
That golden urn, filled with anointing oil ;
That casket of the Lord's peculiar gifts
Of might and counsel ! and to me, yet more,
That glorious model of thine age mature,
My precious brother—yes, what thou shalt be,
When young adventures shall have passed away,
And we, old mates together, sit and tell
Of times that were, when we were striplings here !

JONATHAN.

Ah me, that pleasant vision shall not be.
 Within me, is forewarning of my end,
 And long before thine hairs are silvery,
 Thy brother shall be far from jarring earth,
 And this strange life's innumerable ills!
 I bless thee for thy cov'nant ; spare my father ;
 He shall not harm thee. In the books of God
 'Tis written, thou shalt sit upon his throne,
 And, I, awhile will be thy minister ;
 So Saul himself hath prophesied ! Look not,
 So mute, and wildly ! Strengthen thee in God ;
 'Twill not be yet : we shall have holidays
 Ere that day comes ! But hark, the crowing cock,
 Hath larumed from the farms of neighbouring Carmel,
 And we must part. I need not say, in camp
 Thou hast a strong auxiliar. There, whatever
 Hath been the seed within him, of remorse,
 I plant anew ; I cheat him of ill-temper ;
 And of his cruel plots, I'll send thee word,
 For, well I know, that in his better mood,
 He would ev'n bless me, for thus thwarting him.

DAVID.

Nay, though to my destruction, serve thy father ;
 'Tis the fifth thunder of our Holy Law !

JONATHAN.

But 'tis the noted character of madness
 To hate the best-belov'd. The day will come,
 When Saul shall be himself : I see good signs,

For often will his humour warm towards thee,
And ask why David is so long away ;
Then weeps he, and commands me to declare,
If, he grows not strange-mannered : so, I scan,
As sometimes through the clouds we spy a star,
An augury of disappearing storm ;
And what a heaven of beauty will disclose,
When God removes this veil ! Now, know I well,
Should I abet this transient treachery,
To his own soul, and let him have his way,
He would but curse me, in his better wrath,
And pile the guilt on me.

DAVID.

'Tis argued well !

JONATHAN.

Forbid it God, that Saul who in some battle,
Must give his soul away for Israel,
Should meet his judge, with such damnation on him,
As David's blood, like Abel's, would cry down !

DAVID.

Oh name not Saul, with Cain. In happier times,
I've gazed on him with awe, for in such image
The race of Adam, was at first designed !

JONATHAN.

Hark ! did I hear a stirring in the bushes ?

DAVID.

Some paltry badger grubbing !

JONATHAN.

I must go ;

And we shall meet anon ; and every eve,
 As the soft sunset star, lights up in heaven,
 Its evening sacrifice, we'll pray together,
 And from afar, our double prayer shall meet
 In God's own ear, and in His heart prevail !
 Thou shalt o'ercome with prayer ; or, at the worst,
 Saul, in some triumph o'er the Infidel,
 Shall give with joy, his lordly life away,
 And seek his better crown ; where, home at length,
 And, of the Lord's compassion, all forgiven,
 He shall smile down upon us, benediction,
 From his high banqueting in Abraham's bosom.

DAVID. (*Embracing him.*)

Come—heart to heart ! One long, not last embrace ;
 And so we part with courage ! God preserve thee ;
 We could say worlds of words !

JONATHAN.

And want words then !

DAVID.

Take this poor ring for token. 'Tis the spoil,
 Of some bold chief of Ashdod : poor indeed,
 But, to thine eyes 'twill glitter with the gem,
 Of this my parting tear.

JONATHAN.

Thou bearest still,
 I thank thee for it—my old sword and girdle :

Take then this chain, beside ; but, what's the luck ?
 I've lost it ! 'Twas a massy braid of gold,
 Which from a Gathite, Saul my father took ;
 See, how a bramble tore my skirts to-night,
 It must have ta'en the chain. But tarry here,
 By the bright moon, I will recover it,
 For 'tis hard by ;—don't follow.

[*Goes.*

DAVID.

Mother Eve !

Thou hadst one son, to show how angel-like,
 Thy children should have been ; and holy Abel,
 Seems in this youth revived ! For is not he,
 Of noble Nature, the chief handiwork,
 Whose manliness, o'er-towering other men,
 Hath all the soul of woman tempering it ?
 But ho ! what's coming ?

DOEG. (*Entering in his disguise.*)

By the plague o' murrain,
 Would'st harm a poor old dame ?

DAVID.

Nay, nay, good mother,
 But pray, what brings thee hither, late o' night !

DOEG.

Oh, picking sticks, good master, in the forest.
 My name 's old Huldah, and my husband 's dead ;
 But I've a score of youngers ! Do not stop me,
 'Tis almost cock-crow.

DAVID.

Pass along, old dame,
Art not afraid of stragglers ?

DOEG.

Angels help us,
The times make troops of outlaws. Bad, bad times ;
I pray ye be not such, sir !

DAVID.

Come old gossip,
Get on, get home !

DOEG.

Oh, gossip is't ye call me !
Well poor old folk must talk, when great folk quarrel ;
Strange doings in the world ! lord David's dead,
And one, named Phalti, 's married to the Princess ;
Tut ; Princess what ? The one lord David had,
I miss the name now !

(Cries in the forest. DOEG slips off.)

DAVID.

Lord, preserve my brother !
Ho-ho, some cruel ambush ! Jonathan,
I come—where art thou !

JONATHAN. *(Returning.)*

'Twas a dire mishap ;
Three prowling outlaws drew their swords at me,
Tempted, no doubt, by glitter of this chain ;
On which, enforced to free the world of them,

I've left their bleeding bodies in the copse,
 For, by their calls, there must be more of them,
 And we must hasten !

DAVID.

This is something deep ;
 Did not I hint thee, that I heard somewhat ?
 And even now, a strange old woman passed,
 That may be in their league !

JONATHAN.

Nay, that tells all ;
 They shouted for one Doeg—I surmise
 No other now, than that accursed butcher,
 That slew the priests at Nob !

DAVID.

Up ! after him !
 This way he passed. How could I let him slip ;
 Old Huldah, quotha ? This way, Jonathan !

JONATHAN.

No mercy on him ; he is merciless.
 Thresh every coppice for the skulking fox !
 [*They go out hastily.*]

DOEG steals in, from the opposite side.

DOEG.

Here's but a cursed end to so much pother !
 All killed ! what shall I say to Merodach ?
 The game escaped ; the hunters in the trap,
 And I to bear the cursing ! Well a-day !

I'll cut their thumbs off; swear a score of traitors
 Set on us, with Lord David; out of whom
 I slew my share, as the six thumbs will prove,
 And fled for life, not knowing what besides.

DAVID. (*In the forest.*)

Here, this way went a something!

DOEG.

'Twas a badger!

Doeg is safe to-night! good-by to Ziph;
 Ha-ha, I'll leave no tracks in that direction;
 So, to your comfort, gentles, beat the brake.

SCENE IV. *Maon; the forest.* AHINOAM *leading a pet gazelle.* MERODACH *suddenly appears from a copse.*

AHINOAM.

Oh God preserve us! But I trust, my lord,
 I meet a soldier, who in honour's name,
 Will bid a helpless maiden pass unharmed.

MERODACH.

Unharmed! were I a devil, gentle maid,
 I could not harm thee! Holy angels, lady,
 Are in no terror of the fallen ones,

A H I N O A M .

Then, a fair day to your high courtesy !
I'll take thy leave, and pass.

M E R O D A C H .

The Lord forbid !
Pass not that way —thou'lt fall upon the outlaws.

A H I N O A M .

I know these woods : they are my kinsman's, sir,
And often have I walked in them alone,
Since the first spring-bird twittered overhead.

M E R O D A C H .

But now, I tell thee, they are filled with devils ;
My gentle lady, by thy virgin name,
I do beseech thee, on my bended knee,
Forbear to venture.

A H I N O A M .

What's the hap to-day,
That I am dogg'd by this impertinence ?

M E R O D A C H .

Fair lady, thou hast nursed too long in shade,
The lily-flower of thy young loveliness.
Hast thou not heard what's stirring in the world ?
Hast thou no gallant, near the monarch's court,
From whose endangering service, thou hast learned
That war is, like a dragon, ravaging
The hills and valleys of thy native land ?

AHINOAM.

But not in Maon! What should war do here?
Our shepherds are not martial.

MERODACH.

Bless thee, lady,
In war, the warlike suffer least of all.
'Tis shepherds, children, mothers, youth and age.
And pretty damsels that have most to fear!
This forest is alive with armed men;
And save thou trustest to my proffer'd care,
I tell thee, I have fear for so much beauty,
Lest it should fall too soon.

AHINOAM.

Lord, send thine angels,
To guard a virgin in this awful strait!

MERODACH.

Nay lady, He hath sent a soldier rather,
That craves no higher service, than thy leave
At servile distance, to attend thy steps,
Till thou art past the dangers of this wood.

AHINOAM.

Then come not nearer;—and inform me first
Whose honour I am trusting! Can it be
In thy most awful bearing, I discover
The mighty presence of king Saul himself?
Thy crest waves o'er thee at a kingly height!

MERODACH.

Nay—'tis the highest glory I have won,

That, thou, most lovely lady, favouringly,
 Hast ranked me, by my bearing, over high ;
 Mistaking a chief-captain's self-regard,
 For the majestic manner of his king.
 Now, by the gods, I thank thee, glorious lady !
 And beg thee, task mine honour to its stretch.

AHINOAM.

I had not flattered thee so highly, sir,
 If thou hadst sworn so pert and heathenly,
 Before I praised thee. Is it fashion, pray,
 To swagger in such oaths as this, at court !

MERODCAH.

I crave your pardon, lady ; in these wars,
 We soldiers have caught up the Gathite phrase.
 I fear we do not walk so holily,
 As the chaste daughters of Rebekah would !
 But surely, thou wilt trust a friend of Abner's,
 To guard thee through the forest.

AHINOAM.

If, in truth,

Thou art a friend of that true gentleman,
 Attend me, at thy distance. Didst thou say
 The war was come to Maon ?

MEORDACH.

Even so,

We tracked the flying traitor, first to Ziph,
 But while we waited for an ambush there,
 He slipped us, and is lurking now, in Maon.

'Twas by my counsel, Saul my master came
 Upon this errand ; and I blamed myself,
 That 'twas not ended as I promised him ;
 And so, with honest shame, I'm scouting here
 Mid enemies alone, to serve my king
 With certain information of his foe.
 Saul knows not where I am ; but winds have blown
 Untimely notice of the traitor's hold ;
 For at the break of day, I saw afar,
 The hosts of Saul advancing to these woods,
 With hottest show of haste.

AHINOAM.

I would to God,
 Thou couldst't withdraw this warfare from our fields !
 If thou'rt a mighty man, I pray thee, sir,
 Hear a poor maiden's prayer, and trouble not
 Our past'ral people, with the woes of war.
 Couldst thou not plead with Saul ?

MERODACH.

Oh, make me proud,
 With just one smile of thy surpassing grace,
 And I make oath, I will prevail on him,
 To do whate'er thou bidd'st.

AHINOAM.

Thy price is poor.
 I'd smile on thee forever, if with smiles
 I could preserve one hare-bell in our fields,
 From the red stain of slaughter.

MERODACH.

Then I swear,
 Though I shall lose awhile the smile of Saul,
 And be attainted for a foul deserter,
 Give me but leave to wait on thee sometime,
 Where—as I deem—thou dwell'st with princely Nabal,
 And for thy sake, this David shall be free :
 Though I believe, save thou hadst purchas'd peace,
 Three days should see us in retreat again,
 With his grim head upon an ensign's spear.

AHINOAM.

The Lord avert it. I was in the chorus,
 That day he came from battling with Goliath,
 And never did a soldier charm us so,
 As that young champion of our Israel,
 With the calm glory of his heroship,
 While to the timbrels, we reponsively
 Sang as we danced, *Great Saul hath thousands slain,
 And David tens of thousands.*

MERODACH.

'Tis a debt
 Thou ow'st to David, if this tale be true ;
 For Saul, then first held David for his foe,
 When such as thou, did praise his feat so high.
 Now then, to save the life thou perilledst,
 Trust to mine honour, in the terms I craved,
 And, by the Lord, thou shalt prolong his days.

AHINOAM.

Soldier, at such a distance as thou keep'st,

Thou may'st attend me through this fearful wood;
 And if thou crav'st sometime, in Nabal's hall,
 To hear my thanks, I will not say thee nay.

SCENE V. *Gibeah of Saul; The palace-gardens.* SAUL
 and MERODACH.

MERODACH.

You know me not. Pray hear my story through.

SAUL.

I know thee for a coward.

MERODACH.

Then, a coward
 Hath taught thy newest lesson in adventure.

SAUL.

A coward verily, may point the way,
 Where none but heroes dare to take his hint.
 Where wast thou when thy sov'reign needed thee?
 If that's the insult that the noble feel,
 I toss it in thy face. 'Twill shew thy mettle.

MERODACH.

Then will I give thee thine own cup to drink!
 From Ziph, 'tis said, the traitor fled to Maon,
 For so went rumour when the war broke out

With all Philistia. Tell me, royal Saul,
What thou hast done since then !

SAUL.

Thou say'st it wrong,
For long before this cursed war was kindled,
I tracked the rogue to Maon, where anon
I stirred him from his hold, with all his traitors,
And chased him through the forest like a hart.

MERODACH.

And so you took him ?

SAUL.

By a sly device,
He led me circuits round about a mountain,
Ever contriving to be opposite ;
Till, scattering my men, I zoned the hill,
And stealing up, contracted my strong coil,
Squeezing the renegades each day, still higher
Till to the very scalp, I hedged them in,
And there, all night, with watchfires girded them,
While they, like scorpions writhing, cursed each other,
Expecting ere the day-break to be crushed ;
As I, 'fore heaven, did purpose.

MERODACH.

Nobly done !
Of course, next morning, that campaign was ended ;
You put them all to sword,—I give thee joy,
I see thy story's end ; now hear thy servant's.

SAUL.

Accursed reptile! dar'st thou mock me so!
 Tell me, where then was Evil Merodach,
 That self-sworn shadow of his royal master!
 Deserter, coward, traitor, tell me that;
 Oh, how I hate thee!

MERODACH.

Sure thou hadst no need,
 Of Merodach, in such a play-day fight:
 I did not make enlistment for a chase;
 Remember 'twas for battle—not for sport
 I swore myself thy follower.

SAUL.

Nay, by Baal,
 I hired thee for a catchpoll. Lie not so.
 Nor did I need thee ever, till just then,
 For I was called to warfare!

MERODACH.

Warfare—eh?

SAUL.

Some one, just then, stirs all Philistia up;
 The plagues of Pharaoh burn him! and, at dawn
 Comes a hot message posting from the north,
 And Saul must leave the outlaws for the heathen;
 And not a knave of all my chieftains there,
 To finish what was done! Oh, out upon thee;
 Baal, how I hate such servants!

M E R O D A C H .

'Twas a pity.

S A U L .

A pity, quotha ! Now I'll taunt thee, villain ;
 Where wast thou, in the glorious open field,
 When half Philistia fleshed my chariot-scythes ?
 I tell thee I've seen war, since I saw thee,
 Battle, that dyed whole acres ! Merodach,
 I tell thee, dust rose not beneath my wheels,
 I rode on human clay—I pressed red wine :
 God has not left me yet—I was his angel,
 Destroying legions of the uncircumcised !
 I see thee jealous—but the half's not said ;
 I did not once remember Merodach ;
 I called no lagging chief—I wished no David,
 Save only to look on. I thank my God,
 No arm but his helped Saul that glorious day.

M E R O D A C H .

Ha ! thou art grown devout.

S A U L .

I had been more so,
 If but, meanwhile, my bailiff Merodach
 Had shown his fitting prowess on that mountain,
 With David's runaways.

M E R O D A C H .

An easy slur
 On David's valour ; but, I tell thee, king,
 Philistia blessed herself, that day of carnage,

That David's name made not the battle-cry.
They count ten Sauls to David—like our virgins.

SAUL.

I praise thy wit—but still, thou art a coward.

MERODACH.

Now will I point my wit with argument,
And prick thy boastful humour. Great men, king,
Are mighty in fore-knowing. Thou, as blind
As those that groped in Sodom, saw'st no storm
Brewing among the mists in our horizon,
And couldst afford that hunting-day at Maon,
What time, earth rumbled with appalling omens,
And Dagon's armies, on surrounding mountains,
Hung like beclouded thunder. Hadst thou eyes?
I tell thee Saul, wer't not for Merodach
Philistia's armies had not left a turf,
For thy disdainful foot to tread upon,
From Dan to Edom. Prithee, who was coward!
Who sent the breathless runner that aroused thee!
Who rallied Israel to the field, before thee!
Who unperceived, had marshalled all the host,
And put the easy victory in thy fist?
Thou would'st have had me on the mountain, eh!
Hedging that hive of traitors! Oh, tactician,
Oh noble warrior, war-god, everything;
That chase in Maon—that was glory, Saul!

SAUL.

Thine emphasis lies foully. That was toil,
The after-field was glory. Yes, I say it;

I never knew my unction's strength before,
 Or what an earnest of the victory, lay
 In right divine to wage the wars of God.
 Oh, how I drove! From my hot sword, flew hosts!
 I bore upon them, like the flaming sun
 On scattering rain-clouds. Would thou hadst been there,
 Only to know I do not tell the half!

MERODACH.

I'll witness it: for now, to fret thee more,
 I tell thee—there I was!

SAUL.

Thou there!

MERODACH.

Yes there, by Baal,
 To shout thy name like trumpet—giving o'er
 All envy, in my joy to see thee drive,
 When from a scythed car, thou hurl'dst a chief,
 And, bearing on Philistia, with its steeds,
 Didst reap whole legions, like the summer grain,
 And thresh them, as they fell.

SAUL.

Oh, take it Lord,
 The glory that I won with Jacob's sword!

MERODACH.

Confess thou hast done wrong to Merodach!
 Nay, I'll wring out confession—yea, or nay.
(Draws out three feathers from under his robe.)
 Hast ever seen these plumes?

SAUL.

Was this thy crest ?

I deemed, it was some angel sent from God,
 That wore it in the battle. If 'twas thou,
 I will not minish aught of thy renown,
 For 'tis not in me to disparage valour;
 Thou art the bravest chief that calls me lord.
 Forget this quarrel—count me friend once more,
 And, when again I hold my royal court,
 Prithee, be there, to hear thy merit praised.
 Abner awaits me.

[Goes.

MERODACH.

Grace go with thee, king !

An easy purchased peace ! A maid in Maon,
 Must answer for the blood of many men !
 Ha ! sure enough, I sent the messenger,
 But not till I had made the need of him ;
 And while this badgered king was dragged to battle,
 I've had a pleasing holiday in Carmel,
 With fair Ahinoam.

(DOEG *enters.*)

Say, skulking dog
 Where found ye these three feathers ?

DOEG.

As the fight

Wore off in vict'ry, and I came in battle,
 I saw a hero sheathe a reeking sword,
 And turn from the pursuit. As he departed,

He tore these plumes from off his glittering helm,
 And threw them on the ground. I gathered them,
 But, in a moment, I had lost his track,
 And could not see him more.

MERODACH.

Say naught of this,
 To Saul, my master.

DOEG.

Give them back to me,
 You did but crave their loan.

MERODACH.

Have silence, sirrah;
 Fool! it was I that wore them in the fight,
 And now I claim them.

DOEG.

Nay, it was not thou!
 I judged him from his stature—and 'twas David;
 I know 'twas David, by his nobleness,
 And something sorrowful in his behaviour,
 As, on the shout of triumph, he retired.

MERODACH.

Villain, I tell thee, it was I myself;
 I'll cudgel thee if thou presum'st to lie.

DOEG.

Nay then, I'll say 'twas thou.

[Goes.]

MERODACH.

But gods, who was it ?
 Some mighty man, for whom the strife has relish,
 Beyond the glory of the victory !
 I bless him for bequeathing me his plumes,
 And, by the fiends, I'll wear them gracefully ;
 But ha ! this game grows deeper, all the while !

SAUL returns with ABNER.

SAUL.

Ho ! Merodach, the traitor 's up, once more,
 And packing his battalions every day ;
 But where, we cannot learn.

MERODACH.

I know, my lord,
 Your favourite Doeg came to me, this morning,
 Explaining his disaster, down at Ziph.
 I sent him to some outlaws thereabouts,
 With money, to engage them in an ambush,
 While David lurked there. Lucklessly—he says,
 The outlaws, were surprised by David's men,
 And all were slain ; while, he alone, escaped,
 And brings with him, a handful of fat thumbs,
 Swearing he slew their owners.

SAUL.

Hear it Abner,
 Your friend fights valiantly !

MERODACH.

He adds assurance,
 That David is at large in Engedi,

Among its cliffs and valleys. Up, my lord !
The chase would suit me now.

S A U L .

Go then, beat up
Two thousand swordsmen ; we'll not bate this heat,
'Till we have ta'en the game. What ! rout, in field,
All Gath and Rimmon, and be foiled at home,
Scouting one rogue ! It is my lucky moon ;
We'll scale the heights like hunters for this kid !
Ho ! even now I scent the mountain air !

ACT III.

SCENE I. *The cliffs of Engedi. The camp visible in the vale, below. Saul alone, climbing the rocks.*

SAUL.

Ho, from these crags I catch a glorious view
Mountain, and plain and sea!
I have no shire like this wild Engedi,
From Naphtali to Edom! This hot noon
Maketh the landscape hazy:
Still and sultry spreads
The basking region, to its sov'reign's eye.
There are the flowering vineyards;
The sweet al-henna lifts its blossoms there,
And flings a mingled scent
Upon the breeze, thus high.
How peaceful all things show!
While, on opposing hills,
This very hour, perchance my foe looks down,
Through screening foliage,
From the mysterious caverns hid beneath,
And scans my tents below.

(Pausing.)

I would I were away,
 Scouting the northern Lebanon, in chase
 Of its shy mountain deer !
 I would yon little bird
 That whistles o'er his lauds so cheerfully,
 Had but a heart and tongue, to tell
 Where now, in yonder heights,
 The traitor keeps his hold !
 God sees him somewhere there,
 Lurking mid wilds I see ;
 But, while I know no more,
 This deep-fraught landscape seems to have a soul,
 That, to no king pays court,
 But wrapt in deep impenetrable wood,
 Holdeth the spell-bound air,
 In silent mystery.

(Climbing higher.)

Oh what a dreary world !
 I catch a glimpse of old Sodoma's sea ;
 Its waters, all as calm
 As if no cities with their halls of pride,
 Walls, palaces and gardens, ay
 Princes and warriors too,
 Lay deep beneath its flow !
 In its bitúmen waters long embalmed,
 Like empires in oblivion buried,
 They, at this moment, rest,
 All there—but not a sign !
 The City of the Deep

Boasts ne'er a habitant,
 Sea-maid, or river horse, or water-fiend,
 Behemoth or leviathan,
 Or Dagon's fishy swarm,
 To stare, with glassy eye,
 On its mute maze marine.
 The monsters of the wave
 Spurn all its marble courts,
 And loathe to spawn their vermin-fry,
 In harems, where young princes first saw light,
 While yet it shone in air.

(Leaning on a rock.)

There, at this very hour,
 Lie the rude rabble, all preserved, around
 Lot's hospitable door!
 Lord, what a pang of wonderment it gives,
 To know these awful things embosomed there,
 Yet see that lake alone;
 Naught but its spread of waveless waters now,
 O'er which, the highest eagle, when he soars,
 Drops dead, or fables lie!
 It mocks my curious mind,
 Calm while I rave—mysterious while I muse,
 Mute, when I bid it tell,
 And hoarding from the world in solemn gloom,
 The slumbering nations of its caves below.

(He climbs slowly.)

Sleep well Gomorrah, then!
 Waters more thin than thine,

Each future year a wave,
 Shall bury Saul, and all his kingdom too,
 Deep, and unknown as thou!
 I feel already as the mummies seem,
 Wrapped and embalmed, and named
 Some merchantable word.
 Nay, but I will survive,
 Deathless at least in name !
 Like Amraphel, old Shinar's king,
 And Tidal king of Nations,
 Or Arioch that led Ellasar forth,
 Or, old Chedorlaomer, even as thou !
 Thou—with thy thunder-name,
 'Gainst whom, in Siddim's vale,
 Came Bera—Sodom's king,
 Birsha, Gomorrah's lord,
 Shinab of Admah, little Zoar's chief,
 And Shember of Zeboiim ! Lord,
 They had their quarrels there !
 There—teaching earth new scenes,
 Waged the first battle of the olden time !
 There, where those waters curl
 Above them and their foes ;
 Where, umpire last of all,
 The Sea of Salt rolls o'er their Sabaoth,
 And Time, the conqueror sits,
 Like the cold mourner of a monument.

(Climbs higher.)

Hark, 'tis the goatherd's song !
 I see him clambering

Up yonder mountain-side ;
 His toiling flock behind,
 From washing in cool streamlets of the vale,
 Seeking the clefts of rock,
 To browse, or ruminare, the noon away !
 The goatherd, as he goes,
 Trolls some old past'ral song,
 Traditional with such as these,
 Since the first patriarchs kept their flocks in Dothan,
 That, mellowed into music, comes afar,
 And woos me to a dream.

(*Pauses.*)

And here's a nook looks cool ! it is a cave,
 Where, by the tracks, high-clambering deer abide ;
 And, by the doves that coo upon their nests,
 Naught evil can be near. I'll drowse awhile,
 Upon the beetling cliff—and leave below,
 Yon dwindled camp, to mutter to itself.
 How small looks Earth, as we go nearer heaven !
 Oh, would to God, I lived a hermit here !

*He reclines against a rock, and falls asleep. Presently,
 two of David's guard show themselves, behind the bushes,
 in the cave, pointing him out.*

GUARD.

There, now he sleeps, we'll fall upon him, shall we ?

THE OTHER.

What, fall on Samson ! Look but at his sinews ;

He'd toss us both, like pebbles, down the cliffs!
See his big bust a-heaving!

GUARD.

How he breathes!
What brawny thighs, and see his helmed head!
I'd sooner stir a lion—let us go!

THE OTHER.

Let's call our chief.

GUARD.

Ay, look behind, he's coming!

THE OTHER.

He must come softly. Beckon him!

GUARD. (*Lifting his finger.*)

My lord,
Hist! softly—softly—see what we have found!

THE OTHER.

The Lord hath given thy foe into thy hands;
One sword-thrust ends it all!

(*DAVID enters and discovers SAUL.*)

GUARD.

One fifth-rib stab,
And burial in the cavern!

DAVID.

God of Jacob,
Forgive these cursed words! What, dastards, look ye!
Say, would ye fall upon the Lord's Anointed,

And in his sleep, too! Shame ye—not a hair
 Of his blest head shall fall upon the ground.
 What, doth my exile make me common outlaw!
 And yet an outlaw need not so have smothered
 Nature's religion, as to prate like you.
 Pray, have ye thought my loyalty, pretence!
 I sought this cave for shelter; would ye make it
 A den of thieves and robbers!

GUARD.

'Tis the Lord
 Gives Israel's foe, and thine, into our hands.

DAVID.

Eat down thy words; and prithee, hold thy peace;
 Ye shall defend me, if I call for help,
 For mark the triumph that the noble love,
 And learn a paradise of victory,
 To which your earth-bound fancies never soared!
 Thank God for such a rapture of revenge!
 Ye shall behold me melt this sullen ore,
 Till all the golden nature of king Saul,
 Pours fervid forth, beneath my burning coals.
 Here come more men! Hist! bid them all stand by,
 And know their captain is no renegade.

[He steals towards SAUL.]

GUARD. (*Aside.*)

Saul dreameth not his enemy so near.

DAVID.

Sleep, and take rest, poor Saul! I'll harm thee not;
 Thou hadst but few grey hairs when last I saw thee,

Now Michal could not count them as she used ;
God pardon thee, as I do !

GUARD.

Slay him—slay him !

(DAVID cuts a piece from SAUL's robe, with his sword,
and returns.)

ANOTHER.

Sure this is not the wound he's earned of thee !

DAVID.

Now, God forgive me even this misdeed !
Already doth my spirit sink within,
That I have laid my hand to his Anointed.
Oh, how the sweat stood on his furrowed forehead ;
He seemed to talk in sleep ! Perchance 'twas me,
He cursed in his strong mutt'ring ; but the worst
I'll venture gainst my sov'reign's majesty,
Ye see in this left hand !

GUARD.

I'd venture more.

Look ye, my lord, send me—I'll settle him,
And talk morality about it, after !

DAVID.

Nay, see my victory through ; fall back within ;
Saul must behold this badge of loyalty
Ev'n in my sworded hand. This flag of truce,
Shall float more glorious than surrender'd banners !
Now see me face a lion !

(Calls.) Saul—king Saul !

SAUL. (*Waking confusedly.*)
Tidal of Nations!—poh, where am I? Dreaming!

(*Rises, and goes forth.*)

DAVID.

My lord, oh king!

SAUL. (*Returning.*)

Ho! treason! God defend me!
Draw villain—draw, I say!

DAVID.

Nay, hear me, father,
Why draw thy sword! The winds may take my own!
(*Throws it down the cliff.*)

Why heedest thou the tongues of evil men?
Does David lurk to harm thee! Lo! this hour,
Had I but listened to my servants' tongues,
The sword that glittered thus in empty air,
Had reeked with thy red blood. This cave is full;
But startle not—who looks at thee shall die;
I've hushed their rebel tongues. My heart within
Rose mindful of a thousand brighter days.
See how mine eye overflows; I cannot help it;
Oh, I did reverence to thy better self,
Ev'n more than to thy consecrating oil!
And look, my father, at this purple shred,
I cut it from thy robe, and harm'd thee not.
Thy life lay in this hand, and 'tis unstain'd;
Yea, I breathed gently on thy very sword,
And left it with thee; ay, and touched with awe

The vestment that I marred. Ev'n that repents me ;
 And what is David, that my Lord pursues him,
 A lion roaring for a summer-fly ?
 The Lord shall judge between us, noble Saul !
 And, even now, will save me from thy hand !

SAUL. (*Recovering from amazement.*)

Oh, gracious GOD ! is this thy voice, my son !
 My David !

DAVID.

Oh, my father !

SAUL.

Bear with me !

The thoughts of other years well up within,
 And they must flow in tears.

[*They embrace each other.*]

SOLDIER. (*Aside*)

What's coming now ?

Look, Saul and David—Benjamin and Joseph !

SAUL.

Oh David, thou'rt a better man than I,
 And dost reward me good for many an ill !
 Look, I was even in thy hand ; do men
 Deal thus with one they hold their enemy !
 Thou'st done a deed that makes good angels smile,
 In highest heaven, and quite disarmeth me !
 I've ta'en my life this day from thy true hand,

And David, if there be a God in heaven,
 'Twill more bestead thee, in thy coming years,
 Than my poor death would, now. 'Tis destiny ;
 There is no warring with so good a man,
 And I can read, in this, thy certain fate,
 To be a king, in teeth of Sathan's self !
 'Tis written so in all the books of God !

DAVID.

God save king Saul ! There's not a loyal heart,
 Beats truer to that prayer, in Israel,
 Than mine, my royal master !

SAUL.

I believe it ;
 Yet swear, my son, if ever thou art king,
 Thou wilt be gentle to the house of Saul,
 Nor blot his name, from out his father's line.

DAVID.

King, or no king—I make strong oath with thee,
 Though it were only for thy noble son,
 To shew all honour to the house of Saul,
 Unto my dying day !

SAUL.

Enough, God bless thee !
 I hear my servants shouting after me,
 They must not know that I have met with thee.
 Say—do I look as if I had been weeping ?

VOICE. (*Below.*)

Ho—ho ! king Saul, ho ! art thou hereabouts !

SAUL.

They're calling their lost captain—I must go.
 I'll strike my tents, and march my warriors home;
 And David—all's forgotten! There—don't follow,
 I must pretend I've lain too long a-sleeping.

THE VOICE.

Ho—ho! king Saul! dost hear our voice, oh king!

SAUL. (*Leaping down the rocks.*)

Ho, Merodach! is't thou! I've lain a-sleeping.

MERODACH. (*Below.*)

What, sleeping there! is't so you trust yourself?

SAUL.

Poh, I climb'd up to see the country better,
 And fell a-dreaming on the cliffs.

MERODACH.

Thy robe,

Look, what has tattered it?

SAUL.

Oh, brambles, brambles;

Why dog me thus? I was a-coming, soon.

MERODACH. (*Climbing up.*)

There's strife in camp, we need your royal presence;
 Others are scouting for thee; Abner's left,
 To rein the rebels; let us shout! perchance
 They'll quake to hear the wolf of Benjamin!
 All's well—all's well—all's well!

[*They disappear down the rocks.*]

S A U L.

DAVID.

How that voice echoes !
'Tis a strange voice—do hear it !

MERODACH. (*Below.*)
Ho ! all's well !

DAVID.

Lads ! who was that rough figure ? did ye see him !

GUARD.

It looked like Be'lzebub turned general.

DAVID.

The Prince of devils—by his very voice.
Hark ! how it rings up here !

MERODACH. (*Below.*)
All's well—all's well.

(*The guards lean over the cliffs.*)

GUARD.

King Saul walks straight; dost think he's telling of us ?
See, how that swaggering fellow throws his fists !
Look, he talks angrily—he looks this way,
He must not see us. What 's he pointing at ?

DAVID.

Down fellows ! don't be seen !

GUARD.

How small they grow !
And his hoarse voice, crying *All's-well*, so gruffly,
Floats hitherward like music.

ANOTHER.

Rest we here ?

My good lord David !

DAVID.

Nay, we must climb higher ;

A foe forgiven is a foe forever !

I'll trust him, until sunset, with our secret,

And then seek other foot-hold in these cliffs,

Till every tent is gone, from yonder plain.

See there ! they'll soon be hid ! they're gone ! now hark !

What is't he cries ?

MERODACH. (*In the distance.*)

All's well—all's well—all's well !

SCENE II. *Grove, near the camp ; enter SAUL and
MERODACH.*

MERODACH.

There, hear those soldiers ; they cannot be governed ;

When Saul goes forth, a-muttering to himself,

No wonder they rebel !

SAUL.

What ! funeral notes !

Now, Merodach, thou'st hidden something from me.

They wail for some defence of Israel gone,
Hark, hear them !

MERODACH.

Oh they're drunken !

SAUL.

Hist ! have peace !

SOLDIERS. (*Singing, without.*)

I.

The chariots of Israel
And horsemen thereof,
They're gone—they have vanished
In triumph above;
Wail—Israel, wail !
'Tis the twilight of wrath ;
'Tis the triumph of Baal,
And the revel of Gath !
Wail—wail—wail !

II.

Their champions lie bleeding
On many a field ;
We've slain their ten-thousands
While God was our shield ;
But wail, for in fury,
He's taken above,
The chariots of Israel,
The horsemen thereof !
Wail—wail—wail !

SAUL.

Now, in the name of heaven, what's this ? tell out,

Is Abner—or is Doeg dead ? Who is it
That makes this pother, while King Saul's alive !

MERODACH.

Oh, then, in truth—'tis the old prophet's self,
Old Samuel—

SAUL.

Dead ! forbid it God in heaven !
Dead, said ye !

MERODACH.

Samuel's with old Jacob, sire !

SAUL.

My father dead ! and Saul his son not there !
Art sure ! God help us—that good prophet gone !
Who's left to Saul ! Go, Merodach, call Abner,
And bless thy gods, I do not run thee through !
I should have seen him dying in my arms,
And ta'en his latest breath—oh deep-grain'd devil,
Hadst thou not blighted me with evil counsel !
Go, leave me ; I will never see thee more !

MERODACH.

How's this ? Ha-ha !

SAUL.

Avaunt ! I mean it, fiend ;
Go—and ne'er show thy cursed eye again,
To thy most wretched king ! Old Samuel dead !
A world of Merodachs wont pay for this !
Oh, villain, he had blest me, but for thee,

Before he died ; and now he's cold, cold clay !
 Yes, thou hast been my ruin—and I curse thee ;
 Must I bid twice ? begone.

MERODACH.

Beware, poor king,
 Thy curses may come home to roost, at last,
 Like fowls at eventide !

[*Goes.*

SAUL.

Now, GOD be with me !
 For where 's the stay of Israel in such need,
 Save in his arm alone ! I'm nothing now ;
 What, Samuel dead ! and can I see him never ?
 Never again be pardoned, blest, and prayed for !
 It was not time for this. The Lord knew well
 I had a thousand oracles to ask him !
 But oh, my kingdom's every prop gives way,
 And all comes settling, reeling down on me,
 While, like shorn Samson, I am crush'd beneath,
 All Gath upon me, and my sins beside !

(*ABNER enters.*)

Abner, go tell the camp, their king's returned
 And bid retreat, to-morrow, from the field.
 It is not meet we should have civil wars,
 When Heaven holds controversy with us all.
 To Ramah next, with holy ceremony,
 We'll march, and wail our Israel's glory gone !

ABNER.

Comfort my Lord ! the tumult is allayed,
 And Merodach—

SAUL.

Don't name the wretch to me !

ABNER.

He hath promulged thine orders, even now ;
 And so I come to tell my royal master,
 We do not hope the less for Israel,
 While still our tower of strength, abides in Saul !

SAUL.

I must walk forth a little—I am faint ;
 I'll lean upon thee—I am sick at heart,
 Don't leave me ! Abner, it will not be long
 Ere Saul shall follow Samuel ; all goes wrong.

SCENE III. *The camp of DAVID in the wilderness of
 Paran.* DAVID and ABISHAI.

DAVID.

What say our scouts, Abishai ?

ABISHAI.

There is riot
 In Saul's encampment, and they linger yet
 In Engedi.

DAVID.

'Tis well we have drawn off!
 This riot, is some pleasant trick, I ween,
 Contrived by that strange tiger of a man,
 To keep the king in arms.

ABISHAI.

The scouts say not !
 Some death has happened in the camp ; they spied
 Funereal preparation, and the signs
 Of a retreat to-morrow.

DAVID.

Death! Pray, whose ?

ABISHAI.

They could not learn so far. But, good my lord,
 The soldiers murmur, we shall have deaths too,
 If scruples, are to steal their provender !

DAVID.

What, would the rogues fall foul of neighbouring farms!
 We'll starve together, sooner ! but Abishai,
 I have sent scouts on honest foraging ;
 For, look ye, though I hid it from the troops,
 There is another Job for wealth, in Carmel,
 One of the house of Caleb ! Him, last year,
 I did good service, when we lay in Maon ;
 For then, his shepherds were among the hills,
 And many a time, we drove away the Arabs,
 Who came marauding, like a desert storm,
 From their rock fortress in the dens of Sela,

Where Esau's whelps are bred. Upon this plea,
 Now when he keeps his Pentecost in plenty,
 Adding the fleeces to his harvest-home,
 I have sent courteous scouts to crave supplies,
 And lo! they are returning.

ABISHAI.

Empty-handed!

(Enter scouts.)

DAVID.

Well, what said Nabal, that ye come so light?

SCOUT.

Alas! that Nabal is a churlish man:
 He hath abundance; never saw I yet
 Such a sheep-shearing as this patriarch holds!

ANOTHER.

And 'tis the Feast-of-weeks; he ought to tithe it!

DAVID.

Well—well! what said he? did ye bid him ask,
 Of all his shepherds, how we watched for them!
 Surely, ye must have done mine errand wrong.

SCOUT.

Nay—nay, we did most courteously bespeak him,
 And told him all; on which, most brutishly,
 He curs'd us, and he called us runaways;
 Said he had never heard of Jesse's son;
 Asked, who was David! said that now-a-days
 All servants are a-breaking from their masters;

And—when we argued we were loyal men,
 Fain to live honest, but most sorely straitened,
 He grumbles—shall I give my pleasant things,
 Fatlings and fruits, and bread, to vagabonds!
 I want them for my shearers; get you gone.

DAVID.

Now are we forced to live like Ishmaelites.
 So, forth to forage, Nabal eats his words!
 Here's a compassionating son of Jacob,
 Would let six hundred men be food for ravens,
 To save a tithe of harvest! Ho, Abishai,
 Set here two hundred guardsmen for the camp,
 And let the rest come on. Four hundred strong,
 Each with his trusty weapon in his hand,
 Shall reap red harvest in the fields of Nabal;
 Up, ho! upon the word!

SCOTT.

We'll teach him now
 We are no runaways—till we have done!

DAVID.

Ay, tho' his household hosts outnumber Abra'm's,
 Give out my orders—well-away! This Nabal,
 Shall hear of Jesse's son, before the cock-crow!

[Goes.

ABISHAI.

Ho, then! to arms! a flourish, trumpeters!
 (*Flourish, and the soldiers fall into ranks.*)
 Set forward, my brave lads! Ho! Guardsmen, there,

Have eyes about ye—keep the camp till day-break ;
Ye shall break fast betimes ! Now, onward lads !

[*Goes.*]

They pass on. MERODACH comes suddenly out of a thicket, and leans against a tree.

MERODACH.

Here 'll be hot work ! my plan goes not so well.
Ha, there 'll be noise a-calling Merodach,
Down there in Carmel—how it makes one laugh !
I pledged old Nabal all our hosts to back him,
If he 'd but starve out David. Who could tell
Saul, would be ord'ring this accurst retreat,
Just at the moment ! Pharaoh's plagues upon him !
The churl's in trouble !—well, it makes me laugh,
To think how he 'll be cursing Merodach.
These fellows march with looks of execution,
And I 'll be sworn will eat the fat of rams,
Roasted by embers of his blazing barns.
I 've got him in a pitfall—his concern
Must be the getting out !

A GUARD. (*Entering.*)

May 't please you sir,
Our captain would be glad to learn your errand,
Here in Lord David's camp.

MERODACH.

Ah, certainly,
I'm but a looker-on, a loungee only,
Resting a minute, with my arms akimbo,
To see you fellows file. I never thought !

But—yes—I own it must look quite suspicious.
Commend me to your captain.

GUARD.

Sir, your name,
I'm not sent here to parley.

MERODACH.

Bid your chief,
Come hitherward himself.

(*ABISHAI enters.*)

Good morrow, sir!
I'm but a passenger; a straggler only,
That caught a sight of troops, and stood awhile
To mark their fierce manœuvres.

ABISHAI.

Thou shalt share them!
We press all stragglers. Thou 'st a martial air,
And fellow, thou 'rt enlisted. 'Neath thy robe,
I spy a weapon; come! outside, with it:
Fall into file! and lads, have care of him!

MERODACH. (*Muttering.*)

A curse upon them! But I'll see the sport!

(*Aloud.*)

Oh yes, if that's your game, I'm one of you!

[*Falls into rank.*]

ABISHAI.

Have silence, sirrah!

SOLDIERS. (*Passing on.*)

Forward, lads! Halloo!

They pass out ; and DOEG slips in from the thicket, dressed as a shepherd, with apples in his hand.

DOEG.

Ha-ha ! there's Merodach ! The devil's with them ;
What means this trick ! or, is it 'gainst his will !
His head o'ertops them all, and in his helm,
See how the tall prim feather struts along !
I know his brain is working under it ;
And there'll be sport ! But, by these fellows' looks,
There'll first be fighting. I'll not trouble them.
He bade me give this fruit for him to Saul ;
A stupid present—but I'll carry it,
For I suspect some mischief ; 'tis, they say,
The very fruit that poisoned Mother Eve.

SCENE IV. *Carmel. Time—Evening. Saul's pillar,
and a fountain in the back ground. Enter two of Na-
bal's Shepherds.*

SHEPHERD.

Let's see ; yes—here's the place : this pleasant hill
Shews half the country round.

THE OTHER.

Dost see 'em coming !

SHEPHERD.

Coming! no—bless us, and I told him so ;
 Nobody knew that devil-looking fellow,
 That promised half-an-army ; and I thought
 'Twas all a trick, a-judging by his eye !

THE OTHER.

If David gets the word that master sent him,
 Afore this army comes—good angels help us !
 I'm for not shearing with the rest to-night !

SHEPHERD.

Is this the place though !

OTHER.

Isn't there the Pillar ?
 I heard him tell, he'd be by noon to-day,
 Here by the Trophy, with a world of soldiers !
 That's the old Trophy ! Did'nt I help build it !
 Saul paid us with the sheep, he won that day,
 Of Amelek. You know the spotted wedder !
 I earned him of King Saul.

SHEPHERD.

I see no soldiers,
 And I'm a-thinking Nabal shears a wolf,
 Before the morrow. Shepherd, as for me,
 In Maon there, I've got a cousin-german,
 And think I'll sup with her.

OTHER.

Who's that a-coming !

SHEPHERD.

There then, I've caught thee ! Know ye not that man ?
 So then 'twas all a lie about the pillar,
 And your old weather, eh ! 'Tis forty years,
 Yes—well nigh forty, since, a boy at Mizpeh,
 I saw that head-and-shoulders—but I know 'em
 Far as my eyes can see ! So tall was he
 That he o'ertopped all Israel as he stood,
 With their ten-thousands shouting *Save-the-king !*
 Oh yes, I know that man ; but times are changed.
 See, he's a-coming hither, and he seems
 Beside himself, just as they tell of him.
 I would not like to come athwart his way ;
 Good-morrow—I must go !

OTHER.

But prithee, shepherd,
 I thank thee for thy press of invitation,
 And, by thy leave, I'll sup at Maon too !
*They make off ; and SAUL entering thoughtfully, sits by
 the fountain, and sees the pillar.*

SAUL.

What, here in Carmel ! I've forgot myself,
 And strayed too far ! What fiend hath led me thus,
 To seat me in the shadow of my sins,
 And bawl accusing memories in mine ear !
 Oh, our good deeds, are frail of life as we,
 But follies are immortal ; and this Conscience,
 Haunts, like the voice of God, our every turn ;
 Or, in the soundings of a guilty soul,

Lies, like the water in a dismal well,
A mirror to the sleepless eye of heaven.
Where shall the Earth afford a rest for Saul !
Or, do I wander with the brand of Cain
Burned on my soul, that thus I find no peace !
Good grave why waitest thou ? I meet my sin
Turn where I may ; and worst of all, Oh Lord,
There hangs that cursed trophy over me,
Like thine impending judgment ! It brings back,
In this sad hour, old Samuel's curse at Gilgal,
And re-affirms that sentence. Oh, the lips,
May not recall, that said it. Can it be,
There now, is no appeal ? God's oracle,
Those dear old lips, that bade me first be king,
In the all-artless greenness of my youth,
Are cold, cold clay—but this sad pomp survives,
Prolonging echoes of his awful words,
That ring in memory's ear. They weigh me down !
Oh, that my pride e'er reared that Babel-pile !
Twine o'er it ye rank vines ; eat into it,
Thou strong-tooth'd Time, wind, storm, come crumble it,
Nay, let compassionating thunderbolts
Blast it and me together ; lest hereafter,
Our children's children stand and point at it,
Yea, and cast stones, and say—behold Saul's Folly.
Where shall I turn ! I have let water out,
And here's an ocean breaking through the breach ;
Dam and embankment tottering under me,
While I stand trembling, and do gnaw my tongue,
Like a lost spirit conning life's misdeeds.

Go down, old sun—thou seest my decline
 As I see thine : but Oh, for me, to-morrow
 Comes never more, or only comes in clouds,
 And, like a star burnt out, I set forever.
 Here comes a something ! Innocence meets Guilt !
 A baby tripping with her water-pot,
 And singing out her heart-full of sweet song !

A Child approaches the fountain.

CHILD. (*Singing.*)

I.

When lovely Rebecca
 Went forth to the well,
 She dreamed not, sweet maiden,
 The thing that befell.

II.

But gifts and a lover
 Awaited her there,
 Gold jewels, and bracelets,
 And gems for her hair.

III.

Then hie little daughter,
 And sing a sweet song,
 Bring home the cool water,
 But do nothing wrong.

SAUL.

That's right !

CHILD.

Don't hurt me sir.

S A U L .

SAUL.

No, no ! my lassie ;
Sing on ; who taught thee that soft melody ?

CHILD.

My mother sir. I hope nobody 'll hurt me.

SAUL.

Don't fear, my pet !

CHILD.

I never saw a body
So tall as you, Sir : please to let me go.

SAUL.

No, I must have that song ; pray, what's thy name ?

CHILD.

I must run home ; my mother waits me, sir.

SAUL.

Here, bring your pitcher ! I'll draw water for you,
And then if you wont tell me what's your name,
Why, I must have a kiss !

CHILD.

I cannot kiss you ;
But I can tell you what they call this well,
For 'tis the king's ; we call it the king's fountain,
And that 's his tomb-stone yonder.

SAUL.

Tomb-stone ! what !

Ha, is he dead !

CHILD.

I only know they say so !
 All the girls say that great big tomb is Saul's.
 Is 't not a tomb, sir ?

SAUL.

Tomb ! yes, Lord thou know'st
 I buried Saul and all his kingdom there ;
 The child prates well ; yes, girl—it is a tomb !

CHILD.

I always thought so. Have ye heard the tidings ?
 The good old prophet 's gone, old Samuel !
 Mother has often told me all about him.
 Dost know the story of old Eli, sir,
 How Samuel, when the lamps were flaring out,
 Heard the Lord call him, in the sanctuary ?
 And how his mother, gave him to the Lord ;
 Her name was Hannah—and came every year,
 To see her boy—and made a little coat,
 To bring him every time—I know it all ;
 Now, he 's grown old and dead—it makes me cry !

SAUL.

Weep not, my pretty maid !

CHILD.

Why—you cry too !

SAUL.

Yes, little daughter—for I knew him well,
 And loved him.

CHILD.

And did he love *you* ? That's happy !

SAUL.

Why, bless you, child, what makes you ask me that ?
Yes, he loved me—for he loved every one.
But see, what's coming !

CHILD.

Oh, my sisters sir,
And all the maids of Carmel ; here they come !
This is the way they weep for Jephthah's daughter,
Once, every year : but now it is for Samuel !
Hark, how they sing ; they scatter roses too ;
I picked two baskets for my sisters, full ;
I wish that I was only old enough ;
But, mother says I'm young for funerals ;
Do you think so, sir !

SAUL.

Oh, God bless thee prattler !
Thou'lt weep at fun'ral soon enough, I trow ;
God spare thee from thine own. Let's hear the music.

A procession of virgins passes, singing.

LAMENT.

I.

Angels now keep harvest-home ;
From Judæa's fields they come,
Winging—ay, and singing ;

For a ripened shock of corn,
 In their joyous bosom borne,
 Paradise is ringing.

II.

Weep not then for him at rest,
 Where, in father Abra'm's breast,
 He at length reposes :
 Israel's virgins now bemoan,
 For themselves, themselves alone.
 Sing—and scatter roses !

III.

Weep not for the prophet's days,
 Brightening to a perfect blaze,
 Like a censer's burning ;
 Weep not for its odours given,
 Dying up tow'rds highest Heaven,
 From their bright inurning !

IV.

In Beatitude's repose,
 Till high Heaven itself unclose,
 Rest his head so hoary !
 Who would break his blest abode.
 In the Paradise of God,
 And the noon of glory !

V.

So, for tears, we scatter flowers !
 Though a world of tears be ours,
 He's beyond all sighing :
 If ye shed your tears at all,
 Weep, for Hope's sad funeral,
 And our country dying !

[*They pass on.*

SAUL.

There skulks accursed Doeg. Doeg, ho !
 Dogging these pretty maids through Carmel—eh ?
 Come hither, prithee, I have need of thee.

DOEG. (*Entering.*)

God save your majesty ! I came to seek you ;
 I found some apples in the wilderness,
 And Merodach—

SAUL.

Don't name the renegade,
 Go hunt him for me ; drag him back to camp,
 But name him never. Jonathan ! God bless thee,
 How cam'st thou here ?

JONATHAN. (*Entering.*)

I came to seek thee, father,
 I knew this chill was settling on thy heart,
 And came with comfort.

SAUL.

Oh, I bless thee for it !
 I've bidden a retreat ! To-morrow's dawn,
 Sees us in fun'ral march forthwith to Ramah,
 Where Israel shall be gathered ; for I've ordered
 The solemn pomp of prayer and burial,
 And Saul shall be chief-mourner, without feint.
 Oh, Jonathan, I'm marching to my grave,
 And thou shalt learn the way to mourn thy father !

JONATHAN.

Nay—'tis thy heart-sick moment, not thy mind !
 Come with me, father.

CHILD. (*To JONATHAN.*)

Fill my pitcher first,
Please you—for you're a kind, good gentleman!

JONATHAN.

Yes, lassie, what's thy name?

SAUL.

Oh, yes my love,
I have forgot my promise. There, trip home,
And when you find yourself a grandmama,
Tell the sweet pictures on your lap and bosom,
How you once saw King Saul. Dost hear me child!

CHILD. (*Going.*)

I don't know what it means, sir!

SAUL.

Well, trip home!
Doeg, why wait ye? go find Merodach.

DOEG.

I bear his message to thyself, oh king!
I found some apples, sire, in Engedi.

SAUL.

Here, hand them to me; what said Merodach?

DOEG.

He'd have you taste them; said you only curs'd him
For all his service; and he fain would know
How you would relish fruit, which he did liken
To Samuel's bounties!

SAUL. (*Tasting.*)

Cursed Merodach !

All dust and ashes ! these are Sodom's apples !

DOEG. (*Laughing.*)

Te-he ! ha-ha !

JONATHAN. (*To DOEG.*)

Out with thee, vagabond !

(*To SAUL.*)

My father—my dear father—thou art faint ;

Here drink a little water at the fountain !

Now come with me ; the sun is almost down !

SCENE V. *Between Paran and Carmel. The highway.
A fountain under covert of a hill. ABIGAIL with
HEZRO, and a train of servants, and asses laden with
dried fruit, flasks of wine, grapes and viands.*

ABIGAIL.

We'll bait a moment ; we must not be long,

Nor trust too much to moonlight ! See, the sun

Goes down apace, and warns us to be brief.

Water the beasts and breathe yourselves awhile ;

Come Hezro, help me from my donkey, boy ;

Ho ! you're no 'squire at all, or you'd be quicker,

Just raise your arm a little.

A SERVANT. (*Aside.*)

Beautiful !

How the dark curls o'ershade our mistress' face,
As, scarcely touching Hezro's proffered arm,
She springs to earth.

ANOTHER.

There, just that minute,
She looked so like her mother, when at first
I came to serve in Carmel.

SERVANT.

What a pity,
She ever married Nabal !

ANOTHER.

Oh, say nothing ;
Her mother died of it !

ABIGAIL.

Now tell me, Hezro,
If 'tis not pleasant here, this charming sunset,
To see th' old servants leaning on their donkeys,
Gossip to one another ; while the camel
Chews her dull cud : and yonder fountain warbles
Upon its pebbly floor, cool melodies.
Why 'tis a little caravan ! Just so
The Ishmaelites come o'er our southern wastes,
Plodding beside their patient dromedaries,
And singing as they go. Come near me, lad ;
We must look unconcerned ; but tell me, softly,
What said my lord to David ?

HEZRO.

Oh, my lady,
 He did respond him very churlishly ;
 Indeed he did, although he is my master !
 The men spake smoothly, but he railed his answer,
 And packed them off for knaves and vagabonds.
 But they were never vagabonds, my lady,
 For I remember, when I served in Maon,
 And kept the flocks, before I was your page,
 They too were there, and were a gentle clan,
 That oft came down to chatter with the shepherds,
 And harmed us not, but did us oft a service.
 We never missed a kid ; but often times,
 While there were prowling Arabs in the wood,
 Lord David's men were as a wall against them :
 And we did oft invite them down to Maon,
 And promise them good fortune.

ABIGAIL.

More 's the pity
 They found not better fortune when they came.

HEZRO.

It made the men feel sore ashamed that day,
 And David will not bear it. Noble lady,
 'Tis well that Nabal hath so sweet a wife,
 Or we should die for this !

ABIGAIL.

Come lad, be careful !

HEZRO.

I mean no harm, my lady, but I've heard it :

All the old servants shake their heads, and say
 'Tis well our master hath so fair a wife,
 Altho' he ne'er deserved her; he's not fit
 To smile on one soft lash, of her bright eye;
 Yes, gentle lady, so they talk of thee,
 And say thy husband is a very churl,
 The son of Belial, who can speak to him!

ABIGAIL.

Why, boy you 're crazy : how you prate this evening !
 I do not hear a word you 're saying though,
 For—listen !—yes, on t'other side the hill,
 They 're surely coming—don't you hear their voices ?

DAVID. (*Without.*)

He pays my good, with ill. The LORD do more
 To David, if I leave a man of his
 Before the morning-watch !

HEZRO.

'Tis he—GOD save us !

ABIGAIL.

Now, LORD, be with me, but I'll forth and meet him !

DAVID *enters, with ABIATHAR, and ABISHAI, the soldiers following.*

DAVID.

Halt ! who are these ? and who art thou, bright lady,
 That bendest thy fair knee to such as I !

ABIGAIL.

Oh be not angry with thy handmaiden,

Or turn thine anger upon her alone,
 Tho' she be Nabal's spouse ; who bringeth thus,
 Bottles of wine, and bread in spongy loaves,
 Corn and the fatlings of her husband's fold,
 And figs, and clustered grapes, and summer fruits,
 And sumpter-beasts that bear them to my lord ;
 For know, lord David, when thy servants came
 The lady Abigail saw none of them,
 Else had they ne'er returned uncomforted.
 For if my lord but measured Nabal's mood,
 There 's chiefly in him, what his name imports,
 A foolish humour—that doth imitate
 A son of Belial, more than he intends !
 Why slay a household for a peevish word ?
 It is the Lord that sends me to withhold thee,
 And keep thine hand unstained. I pray the Lord
 Thy foes may all mean little ill as Nabal,
 In his most fond replies !

DAVID.

I bless thee, lady,
 That thus thou meet'st me. Have thy will, 'tis done.
 Thou hast defeated twice two hundred men,
 With only half thy plea.

ABIGAIL.

Oh, take my lord,
 These bounties, for thy gallant soldiery,
 And pardon this adventure on thy grace.
 I know a hero hunteth for thy life,
 But GOD is on thy part, all Israel know it,
 And send, from hut, and hospitable home,

Their many prayers for thee! Thy life is charm'd,
 While all thine enemies do hold their souls,
 Loose as the pebble, in thy whirling sling,
 When great Goliath bowed before a boy!
 So then, when thou at length art God's Anointed,
 'Twill be no sorrow to have shed less blood;
 And I'll be happy that my husband Nabal,
 Shall find no pretext for disloyalty.

ABIATHAR. (*To DAVID.*)

'Tis argued well! Thou wert a very Balaam,
 To press still forward, when we've met an angel,
 Waving the sword of holy innocence,
 Across thy hasty way.

DAVID.

But tell thy husband,
 Save thou hadst met me, with that face of thine,
 I purposed, by the Lord that thus hath stayed me,
 To steal the morrow from his churlish eyes!

ABIGAIL.

Farewell, my lord! my servants would retreat,
 And I, perchance, shall see thee never more.
 But when the Lord hath ripened into fruit,
 Thy buds of early promise, think sometimes,
 Of one that for a moment, crossed thy path
 In dreamy youth; who, wheresoe'er she dwells,
 Can ne'er forget, the streams have mingled once
 Of thy great life and hers,—and that her lot
 Hath been so favoured, as to throw, at least,
 A passing shadow on thy memory.

DAVID.

Go up, in peace; my noble lady, thanks
For thy rich gifts ! and take in gift, from me,
Thy household, ransomed by thy gentle voice !

(*ABIGAIL departs with her retinue.*)

That ever Nabal should have called her wife !
Look ye, my men—who finds a heart to fight,
Speak, he shall fight with me !

ABISHAI.

Oh, I foresaw it,
Like Samson thou hast yielded to a girl,
And drowned the warrior in a woman's tear !
But who can stand 'gainst beauty—and an apple ?
We 're sons of Adam—let us have the fruit,
And, good my lord, we too will make surrender !

DAVID.

Or, if there be a craven that does not,
He takes no gift of that fair peace-maker's !
Now, with our forage, back to camp again !
March him with Nabal's asses, who demurs.

SOLDIER.

Please you my lord, there 's one makes mutiny
Among the men ; the villain called thee rebel,
And they fell on him for it.

DAVID.

Bring him hither !

ABISHAI.

Here comes the tumult and the prisoner !

(MERODACH *is brought in.*)

Ho! 'tis my new recruit. Come this way, fellow.
What is thy name ?

MERODACH.

Speak gently; I 'm no fellow.
Let David know I 'm of the royal army,
Chief captain under Saul; and he must answer
For this affront to majesty and me.

DAVID.

Unhand him, lads! we need no foul advantage.
But now we 'll hear Saul's general explain,
His wish and errand in our humble camp.

MERODACH.

Saul's gen'ral will not tell!

DAVID.

Did I not see thee,
Walking with Saul one day in Engedi?
Thou art a noted shape; I think I saw thee!

MERODACH.

I often walk with Saul; and, in his name,
Demand my liberty to do so still!

DAVID.

Go, free as air! I've spared thy mighty master,
And will not have a meaner prize than he.
Go—and tell Saul, himself may search us out,
Since we do rev'rence even to his spy!
He's our true king, and ev'n the servile neck

That Saul hath stepp'd on, is secure with us !
 Yes—go, with virtuous hisses on thy head,
 And take thy craven life from nobler men !

MERODACH.

My Lord, if ever hand to hand in battle,
 We meet—as pray we may—I shall remind thee,
 Of these foul words : meantime I put them out
 At fearful usury against that day !

(He stands aside, and DOEG is brought in, as a spy.)

ABISHAI.

But stop ! who 's here ? they 're coming one by one.
 Who art thou, villain ?

DOEG.

One of Nabal's shepherds !

ABISHAI.

Then Nabal's shepherd, thou wast nigh thy death,
 One good half hour ago.

ABIATHAR.

But nigher, now !
 Thou murd'rous dog, what madness brings thee here ?
 My lord, 'tis Doeg ! Let him not escape ;
 Seize on him, fellows !

DAVID.

What is in the wind ?
 A wilderness of beasts is set on us.
 Doeg speak out thy errand, skulking here.

DOEG.

Bid them unhand me ; they have vile advantage ;
Think you I 'll tell, while I am handcuff'd so ?

ABISHAI. (*To DAVID.*)

My lord, I 'll spit him on my double-edge,
And let the toad's foul venom out that way,
So thou wilt say the word !

[*Offers to thrust.*]

DAVID.

Nay-nay, Abishai !

DOEG.

My lord, I thank thee for fair fight between us !

ABISHAI. (*Striking him.*)

Fair fight ! take that, thou reptile.

DOEG.

Cry your grace !

DAVID.

Now, Doeg, I remember that crack'd voice.
Old Huldah of the forest spoke just so,
One moonlight night, like this ! What makes thee here ?
Put down thy crook ; I 'll find a distaff for thee !
How dar'st thou put these manly garments on ?

ABISHAI.

Get me a spindle to let out his life !
But first, tell wherefore thou art lurking here.

DOEG.

I came disguised, to get into this camp,

And say, that on my very soul, lord David,
I never liked king Saul!

DAVID.

Then do I hate thee :
A friend of Saul, had found a friend in me !

DOEG.

Oh, but he hung my grandam, good my lord !
And then, there 's one named Merodach, has come
Into his counsels. He's a precious rascal !
And, it was he that married off the princess,
To—what's the name ? No, friend of thine my lord !

DAVID. (*Aside.*)

Hear that, Abishai ! such a sacrilege
Grew not unplanted, in the will of Saul ;
I knew it must be as this secret proves !

ABISHAI. (*To DAVID.*)

Milk the she-ass awhile, for telling this,
We'll have the cream anon !

(*To DOEG.*) Go on ; what more ?

DOEG.

That Merodach 's a most ensanguined villain ;
Oh, save me Holy Ark, from bloody men !

ABAITHAR.

Dar'st thou say this, thou reeking-jawed hyena,
Fresh from the graves of Nob ?

DAVID.

Go on, old Huldah !

DOEG.

You mock me, sir; but—as before in Huldah's,
 So now in shepherd's weeds, I've cloaked the soldier,
 To serve thee with the story of thy wrongs,
 And pledge my service in avenging them.

ABIATHAR.

Oh, hang the wolf the rather for his raiment !

MERODACH. (*Coming forward.*)

My lord, one word !

DOEG.

Oh, heaven preserve us, hold him !
 This is that Merodach !

(*ABIATHAR looks at him sharply, and goes out.*)

DAVID.

And, art thou he ?
 Then villain, draw thy sword !

MERODACH.

Nay, good my lord,
 This is no time to arbitrate our quarrels ;
 But I profess, that on a soldier's honour,
 I'll give thee warrant for my errand here,
 At a more fitting hour. At present hear me,
 And know the war is ended. All is well ;
 To-morrow Saul retreats to Gibeah,
 And thence to Ramah. Peace is made already,
 For God, in heaven hath spoken its decree,
 In the old prophet's death. Thou hast not heard it,

But Samuel hath gone up to God at length,
As 'twere another Enoch ! Peace my lord,
Is as the mantle he hath left behind.

DAVID.

The Lord forbid ! this peace is bought too dear !
The chariots of our Israel are gone up
With his pure soul to God. Nay—can it be ?
Oh, I was praying for the dove and olive,
But raven, thou hast brought a cypress bough.

ABISHAI.

Here comes a runner !

RUNNER. (*Entering.*)

God preserve lord David !

The noble Jonathan hath sent me hither
With this his ring, for token—

DAVID.

Yes—'tis his !

RUNNER.

To say predicted peace at length hath come !
He blesses thee that thou hast spared his father,
Bids thee come weep with Saul and him, at Ramah,
And bless the Lord, the land's at rest once more !

DAVID.

He died to make us brothers : our estate
Is peace,—best treasure that a sire could leave !
Go, Merodach, I'll meet thee next at court ;
And Doeg thou hast ten-times forfeited
Thy worthless life ; to Saul himself, and me,

False as to God! I must hang up thy carcase,
As first peace-offering.

DOEG.

Oh! no peace for me?
Who should be hanged for stratagems in war?
Try me in peace—if you would learn my merit;
You'll have fat kine, my lord—I know the trick
Of making them breed bravely.

MERODACH.

Silence, villain!
My lord, I mentioned that this peace was made,
Chiefly to claim this rogue for royal judgment,
Since now, it is his right to answer there!
I've heard the dastard rail against my honour,
And even the king's most sacred majesty;
I beg thee—he's my servant—let me have him!

DAVID.

I thank thee for reminding me: yes, take him.

MERODACH.

And tell my reverend lord Abiathar,
Who stared upon my wicked countenance,
And fled, as I were Sathan; that I beg
He'll come to court, and see this vagabond,
Hanged in the highway, for his bloody part,
In old Ahim 'lech's glorious martyrdom!

DOEG.

Oh, my brave Merodach, forgive old Doeg!

MERODACH.

Hist! with thy howling! Thus the thunder-cloud
 Goes off in rainbows. Peace be with your worships!
 [*Goes out with Doeg.*]

DAVID.

Once more to Paran; for how long 'twill last
 No prophet may divine; but still awhile,
 Try we the fortunes of the wilderness,
 Till it be found this newborn peace survives.
 Yet bless the Lord for rest! my brother's signet
 Hath well assured me, that this proclamation
 Is from the height of heaven given out,
 And sealed with Samuel's death! Who now is left!

(*ABIATHAR returns.*)

Abiathar we'll fare along together,
 And thou, Abishai, marshal on our ranks.

ABIATHAR.

I could not bear that face of Merodach's;
 It seemed a vile perversion of my sire's!

DAVID.

Come, let us walk in meditative mood,
 And gazing on yon moon, discourse of him,
 Who hath gone up beyond her silvery sphere;
 The rev'rend prophet! didst thou hear the word?

ABIATHAR.

I learned it of the runner as he passed,
 And wept in silence: but would more bewail,
 Were not this death, the blessed consummation,
 Of a most glorious walk with God below;

And did I not believe, in my strong faith,
 Such saints, do more bestead our Israel,
 There in the presence-chamber of the LORD,
 Than, when they groaned, in these far outside courts,
 And wailed their intercessions, through their sins.

SCENE VI. *The Palace, in Gibeah. A corridor, with balcony overlooking the open country; MERODACH talking with Ziphites, at the door of the Throne-room.*

MERODACH.

Go in, and tease the king. Now Samuel's buried,
 'Twill not be hard to bury Peace beside.
 Remind him that lord David keeps the field,
 And still plays cunning game. One peevish word
 Is all I ask: I've got three thousand men,
 Picked, and upon the start: a word of war,
 And they are up like tigers! Did ye say
 He camps in Jeshimon?

ZIPHITES.

Ay—underneath

The hill of Hachilah.

MERODACH.

Just tell it Saul,
 And I'll come in and fire him to the fight.

If his dull humour conquers—then, by Baal,
He shall be seven-times fiercer than at first,
By this day sennight.

ZIPHITES.

We 'll go in, my Lord.

He opens the door, and the Ziphites pass in. MERODACH stands in the balcony, looking northward. DOEG enters stealthily behind, and listens.

MERODACH.

The inevitable end must come anon.
There are seven spirits chained on yonder mountains,
That must be loosed, if he is troublesome.
Saul's thread is spun! 'twill take a little space,
To reel and clip it. I will whet the shears.

DOEG.

Captain, your words are broken into ranks,
And march like heroes ; but your men are swearing,
That Saul befooled them there in Engedi,
And Sathan's self can't drive them forth again.

MERODACH.

Ha, Doeg! I was calling thee just now.
The king, thou know 'st, had doomed thee to the death,
For what thou didst in Maon ; but I urged
Thy skill in scouting, and obtain'd thy pardon.
Now then he needs thy service, to spy out
The rebel camp, at Hachilah in Ziph.
So forth at once—and bring us certain word ;
For which, king Saul will give thee place, once more.
He lacks an armour-bearer.

DOEG.

But the men,
I tell thee, they wont march.

MERODACH.

I say they shall !
And Doeg—dost thou see that cypress yonder ?
I'll swing thy carcase from its highest bough,
Before the sunset, save thou art away
Buying an honest pardon. So, begone.

[*Goes in to SAUL.*]

DOEG.

A pardon, is it ? Sathan take his pardon !
Doeg has done too much for this curst Saul,
With never word of honour, till, at last,
He'd have an armour-bearer to be shot
By some mischance for him. What's Saul to Doeg ?
Doeg wont take his pardon ! But to think !
I ~~have~~ have been all but hanged a hundred times,
Sticking my head into some lion's jaws,
To count the teeth for him ! And now—he'll pardon !
These pardons make vile wages. I'll to Carmel,
And hide with Nabal's shepherds, till the times
Are changed for better. I'll not take his pardon.
I have suspicion Saul's last days are coming,
And David, so they say, will next be king.
Oh, my judicious instinct ! I remember
That funeral procession of the mice
From my old barn, three days before it fell ;

And the like wisdom sounds retreat from Saul !
A curse on Merodach and curse on all.

[Goes.

*MERODACH comes out of the Throne-room, and stands
thoughtfully, leaning over the balcony.*

MERODACH.

Poor king, yet noble, thou shalt waken yet,
And tremble at the game thou hast adventured,
Unconscious, what impalpable array
Of viewless beings, have a hold on man,
When once untether'd from the anchorage
Of God's most holy fear ! Blind human race,
Ye see not, though ye see ; and things more real,
Than all the transient world ye feel and know,
Are all your life-time intimately near,
And through eternity must leave their mark,
Though, while they make their impress, unperceived.
Ah, could the world's good citizen, but gain
A glance at all he deals with ; could he wake,
Or dream the things named—in the gross—Mysterious,
As they shall be explained at the last ;
How would his prosy day, grow marvellous,
And his dull world flame round him like a hell !

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *The Anti-Libanus. Moonlight.* MERODACH
*alone, climbing the glaciers. A noise is heard like
thunder.*

MERODACH.

There crashed an avalanche,
From highest Libanus ;
And ho ! another falls a-near,
Glancing a thousand moonbeams,
As the crystal rocks of ice,
Go thundering down below.
And hark ! it is the mother-eagle screams,
As snaps the high branched pine,
And her nest and her brood are buried.
Far, far, in the valley below,
The peasant awakes in fear,
As he hears the alarum on high,
And the booming destruction comes down !
He wakes, and he prayeth his prayers ;
The prayers that he prayeth are vain.
A mountain is piled on his roof and his home,
And the cry, and the crashing are still.

(Climbs higher.)

Earth, in these solitudes,
 Makes bold to talk with God,
 And lifts her head sublime to heaven,
 Where breaks no mortal voice
 On the long Sabbath of her quietness.
 But spirits, where are ye
 In icy fetters pining ;
 Ye who once chained the soul of Saul ;
 Ye whom the harp disarmed,
 When David rallied his good angels,
 To drag ye hither thro' the viewless air ?
 Spirits, say where !

(Pauses.)

If such the might of song ;
 Ye too shall have enchanters
 Mimicking once more,
 The spell of Moses' rod :
 And Pytho shall be praised upon the lyre,
 Loud as the Hebrew's Lord.
 A blind old man shall be
 To roam the sunny islands,
 That float upon the sea,
 And on their hills, and on their valleys,
 Forever, shall his song enshrine
 A fair idolatry.

(Climbs higher.)

Enchantress hear'st me not,
 That calledst me afar ?

I come to bid the spirits back again,
And seven beside, more strong.
Their harper foe is gone forever,
And Saul is thine once more.
Say witch, where art thou ?

VOICE.

Come on !

MERODACH.

Ah, Magdiel, art thou there ?

VOICE.

Ay, teaching the new seven. Did ye hear,
The snowballs that we bowled upon your head ?

SCENE II. *The camp of David in the wilderness of
Ziph.* DAVID and ABISHAI.

DAVID.

Here 'tis already, as I prophesied !
My scouts have heard it from a traveller,
The king 's once more in arms and on the march.

ABISHAI.

Then, good my lord, we 'll have a battle now
Upon the field of Maon ; I foresee

This trouble must be soothed by lance and sword ;
And so, God send the shock !

DAVID.

Abishai,

Hast seen a charger, when a trumpet sounds,
How his hot mettle is at once a-stir ;
His tapering ear a-pivot, and his haunch
A-ground, while he doth breast and paw the air,
And swell the veins upon his massy neck !
I own it, that my eye did roll like his,
And all my spirit flourish like his mane,
When this first war-note rung: but 'twas a gush
That went in one suffusion of my cheek.
Never shall David lead a traitor's march,
Or win a rebel's field ! If unawares
This Merodach, or Abner fall on us,
We stand on our defence: but 'tis no part
Of sterling valour, to be valorous,
Where we should first be loyal. I am sick
Of this vile badger's life that I have led,
And since I've touched no inward nerve of Saul
By gracious deeds—my only sword for him ;
I must avoid his way.

ABISHAI.

I would to God

This cut-throat Merodach might pounce on us,
Before the second watch !

DAVID.

The Lord avenge us,

As he hath done on Nabal! See, my friend,
I kept my hand from blood, and Heaven itself,
If—as you hear—the churl has died the death,
Hath ta'en my quarrel, and destroyed my foe.
But now, if we 've brought war to peaceful Carmel,
'Twere shame to leave the lady Abigail
To the marauding of our foragers,
Or Saul's out-lying troops that know no law.

. ABISHAI.

The lady's safer than when Nabal lived,
For he was drunk from morn to eventide,
And did but clog her spirit all his days.
She found him deep besotted in a revel,
That eve when she returned ; and when, next day
She moralized about his foul debauch,
And told him how near neighbour thou hadst been
With thy good swordsmen—to enforce it more,
His stupid spirit did expire within ;
And so at last, his ghost went out of him,
Only with thinking of the death he died !

DAVID.

So the fool dieth! Send a guard of honour,
To greet the lady Abigail for me,
And offer her the safety of our camp.

SCENE III. *Carmel. The open court of Nabal's dwelling, adorned with fountains and trees. The porter, and other servants passing. Enter DOEG wearing the attire of an officer.*

DOEG.

My service to your master, and go tell him
One waits to see him.

PORTER.

Where on earth dost live ?
All the world knows, that master 's in his grave,
This day 's a sennight !

DOEG.

Yes, I meant your mistress ;
The lady 'll do. Go, call her, fellow, sirrah.

(The porter goes.)

Dead, said ye ? What a change my purpose takes !
'Twas a good chance I thieved this livery,
For here 's a pleasant nest for one that 's daring.
How sympathetic with the gentle widow
My humour grows. I 'll buy that pardon now ;
And when the king hath made me armour-bearer,
Why then—I see it all ! I 've caught a glimpse
Of long expected fortune. Here it comes.

(ABIGAIL appears at a lattice.)

My noble lady, grace upon your weeds ;

Lord pity thee, fair widow ! I'm from Saul,
 A bold lieutenant in his body-guard,
 Inviting thee, to come with me for safety,
 For war 's broke out—there 's danger of marauders,
 And Carmel we have ta'en for battle-ground.
 But if thou 'lt share his hon'able protection,
 Thou shalt not suffer in this tide of war,
 But very like, some gallant officer,
 Will raise thee to a loftier marriage-bed,
 Than this of farmer Nabal !

ABIGAIL.

Out upon thee ;
 No soldier would talk so. Begone thou caitiff,
 My household servants shall protect me first.
 How could a king despatch a wretch like thee,
 To spit upon my weeds ! I will not take
 A moment's succour from his bloody hand.

(To the porter.)

Caleb, show out this man.

DOEG.

Oh, lovely lady !

ABIGAIL.

I'll send my servants with an ox-goad to thee ;
 Ho ! help, within. There 's more it seems, behind him.
 Bar up the gate-way, Caleb !

(The guard of David are seen approaching, without.)

DOEG.

More !—where—where ?

Oh save me ! Caleb, shew me out the postern ;
 These are lord David's ruffians ! Bar the gates ;
 No doubt they come to forage. Where 's the postern ?

SCENE IV. *The camp of David.* ABISHAI, and sentry.

ABISHAI.

What dove is this that brings an olive branch !
 See, who 's a-coming ?

SENTRY.

One as it should seem,
 In Saul's guard-liv'ry.

ABISHAI.

Bid him fear not.

SENTRY. (*Calls.*)

Peace !

ABISHAI.

Doeg—by all that 's good—and yet unhang'd !

DOEG. (*Entering.*)

You will not harm me ?

ABISHAI.

Harm thee ? no—poor dog.

DOEG.

I pluck'd an olive branch to show I came
In peace, to join myself at last to David,
For David serves the Lord !

ABISHAI.

Why—long ere this
We did suppose thee hang'd. How didst thou 'scape !

DOEG.

Oh, Merodach, it doth appear, is Sathan
Possessing man, as once he filled the serpent.
I 've got away pretending 'twas to scout,
But, as I did propose the other time,
My heart doth fasten me to noble David.

DAVID. (*Entering.*)

What—what ! not hang'd, old Huldah !

ABISHAI.

He comes here,
Escaped from Merodach, to prove his will
Is but to serve your fortunes.

DAVID.

Tell me then,
Is the king's army verily in Ziph ?

DOEG.

Your servant, noble David, to the ground !
He 's camped in Hachilah by Jeshimon,
Whence thou hast just retreated.

DAVID.

I 'll send scouts,

And Doeg—thou shalt lead them where thou say'st.
 No words—I 'll use thee, if thou canst be faithful,
 If not, thou diest the death.

DOEG.

Give me the lead!
 I 'll bring thee back the most especial word;
 And even now I bear good tidings with me,
 For that curst Nabal's dead, of whom you wot,
 And you can forage to your heart's content,
 In Maon and in Carmel.

DAVID.

Fool, have peace;
 We keep no coward here, to lay foul hand
 Upon a widow's store.

DOEG. (*Aside.*)

Then what on earth,
 Were those stray fellows coming for, at Carmel?
 I hope they saw me not.

(*Aloud.*)

King Saul intends
 To forage there, I heard.

DAVID.

Ay, ay! no danger!
 Abishai, see the best pavilion spread,
 In middle of the camp; and furnish it
 With the poor choice of all my tent affords.
 The lady Abigail will be this way
 At least by eventide.

(*He talks with ABISHAI, aside.*)

DOEG. (*Aside.*)

Baal ! what is that !

I 'm gone if that 's the play ;—I see it all.
There 's nothing left but using what I 've seen,
And bearing word to Merodach, at last ;
But then I 'll magnify what I have done,
And claim a better wager than his pardon.

DAVID.

Here dog, what means this mutt'ring to thyself ?
Thou shalt have ten picked guardsmen. And, Abishai,
Command the lads to have a care of him,
And be in camp by midnight !

DOEG. (*Aside.*)

Catch me here !

I 'll use the midnight for a better game.

(*Aloud.*)

Yes, good my lord, and when they say 'tis true,
As I have said—then pay me all my due.

[*They go out with ABISHAI.*]

RUNNER. (*Entering.*)

The lady Abigail, my lord, is coming,
And with her, five fair damsels of condition ;
And we have loaded camels with her couches,
And stuffs for thy pavilion.

DAVID.

Bear this word

To our chief-captain ; and be speedy, prithee !
Oh yes, here comes her caravan again :

She looks the lovelier for her weeds of mourning,
 So like a princess, girt with fair attendants,
 And servants bearing urns, and stuffs and vases !

(*ABIGAIL enters, with AHINOAM.*)

My noble lady—welcome to our camp,
 This is war's fortune ! Ye are weary all,
 And well it is, ye bring your own appointments ;
 We soldiers have but hard divans to offer,
 But, a pavilion, which I took from Gath,
 Is yours to dwell in—prithée, count it home,
 While here you share our lot.

ABIGAIL.

My good lord David,
 I've brought my ladies with me, not alone,
 But this my cousin, fair Ahinoam,
 Who was my guest—till thus I make her thine :
 For while these times continue, we must take
 Your offered grace ; my household hosts at Carmel
 Will garrison our home—but, more secure
 Ourselves in your pavilion will abide !

DAVID.

Were it a palace ye were welcome more ;
 And your fair cousin shall assist your mind,
 To think 'tis home indeed.

ABIGAIL.

We would not choose
 To add ourselves to your o'ercharg'd concern,
 But that occasion bids. It happened so,
 Your men came up, just as an officer

From the king's camp, was rudely vexing me,
And would have led me to the royal quarters.

DAVID.

An officer—who seemed he ?

ABIGAIL.

He was clad
In livery that mock'd the limbs it dressed.
He seemed some goatherd in a soldier's suit ;
But called himself an officer of Saul's.

DAVID.

Liar and coward ! had he blinking eyes,
And in his hand a spear ?

ABIGAIL.

The very same !
A ruffian by the note of skin and hair,
And his war-raiment seemed a masque put on.

DAVID.

That deathless Edomite again, as ever !
I fear he 'll slip them ! If it please you, lady,
Your poor pavilion will be waiting soon,
Or better, if your own arranging eye,
O'ersee its easy preparation now.
Your escort waits you. At the even-tide,
By your kind grace, I will attend you there ;
Meanwhile God's love be with you !

ABIGAIL.

But remember,

We must not here live idlers in the camp,
 'Tis woman's nature to be serviceable ;
 Make us the servants of these brave campaigners,
 And call our tent your hospital : you 'll find
 We 're good physicians, and most ready nurses,
 Not over proud to wash the very feet
 Of any sick or wounded.

DAVID.

Fair physician,
 I trust we shall not task your pharmacy.

SCENE V. *The same : in the Pavilion.* ABIGAIL and
 AHINOAM, with attendants. DAVID as guest.

DAVID.

Nay, I will ne'er join battle with my king.
 Once more, I 'll melt the sullen soul of Saul,
 And if he then will take no solid shape
 From mercy's genial mould—I 'll flee away ;
 Else shall I perish passive to his wiles.
 I 'll go with my six hundred unto Gath,
 And leave my country the devise of rest.
 I know king Achish for a gentle heathen,
 Who, seeing Saul accounts me for a foe,
 Will bid me welcome, and bestow on me

Some city of retreat ; retiring whither,
 With thee, fair lady, as thou hast consented,
 We will contrive to think it a new Carmel,
 Preserving there our faith and holy rites,
 And cherishing good hope, till better days.

ABIGAIL.

But now, my lord, thy mention of king Achish,
 Reminds Ahinoam to ask of thee
 That vesper hymn, thou didst compose in Gath,
 Which she from tongues traditional hath caught,
 And often at this hour, is wont to sing,
 In evening worship of our fathers' God.
 For she is our musician, noble David,
 And thus hath ventured, in thine armed camp,
 To deck with grateful instruments of song,
 Lyre, harp and lute, reminding us of home,
 Thy fair pavilion.

DAVID.

I do bless her for it ;
 So long have I been stranger to the lyre,
 I take it, as I greet a long lost friend.
 My fair Ahinoam, wilt sing with me ?

AHINOAM.

I'll give thee symphony upon the lute ;
 And we will all join chorus.

DAVID.

'Tis the hour
 That filleth up the day : and may the Lord

Accept the hands I lift upon the lyre,
 For evening sacrifice : his name be blest !

(Symphony of harp and lute, and they sing.)

EVENING HYMN.

I.

At all times will I praise thee, Lord,
 My song shall be of thee,
 When morning's earliest lark hath soared,
 Or sunset tints the Sea ;
 Come magnify with me his power,
 And strike the warbling string ;
 So always, at the vesper-hour,
 Together let us sing.

II.

Oh taste and see that He is good,
 For blest the man shall be,
 Whose trust in evil hour hath stood,
 Unshaken, Lord, in thee ;
 Thine angel walks bright sentinel,
 Encamp'd our tent around,
 And half the heavenly armies dwell,
 Where'er the just are found.

III.

I will both lay me down and sleep,
 And wake alike secure ;
 Thy judgments are a mighty deep,
 And all thy ways are pure ;
 And therefore as beneath thy wings,
 My soul in peace shall hide,
 And glory to thy MYSTRY sings
 This holy eventide.

ABISHAI. (*Without.*)

Ho, there ! my lord, within !

DAVID. (*Going to the door of the tent.*)

What is 't Abishai !

ABISHAI.

My Lord, your scouts have come, and bring us word,
That Saul indeed encamps in Hachilah.

DAVID.

Is Doeg with them ?

SCOUT. (*At the door.*)

Nay, he questioned us

If lady Abigail were coming hither,
And seem'd in trouble, when we told him, yes.
Anon, or e'er we knew, he slips aside,
And left no tracks ! We think he's Asmodai,
That wraps his servants in the viewless air,
And doth incorporate, where'er he will.

DAVID.

We must not let this fellow prate of us.
Who 'll go a starlight march with me, to-night ?

SCOUTS.

I—I—my lord !

ABISHAI.

I need not proffer, surely ;
My lord will bid me, if he needs my service.

DAVID.

Detail two hundred; we in vanguard go;
 The soldiers, half a furlong in our rear.
 Haste! set them in array; a trumpet-note!
 I'm at your head, anon.

ABISHAI.

Anon my lord!

*[Goes off with scouts.]*AHINOAM. (*To DAVID.*)

What, must you fight to-night?

ABIGAIL.

Leave here your sword,

Oh, go not to the battle!

DAVID.

Oh, no—no!

A parley only,—we must have a truce.
 Sleep and dream blessed things; and if you wake,
 Fear not for me; yet may ye, if ye list
 Whisper a prayer and then lie down again,
 For so I love to be remembered ever,
 By those I love, when I am far from them.
 I leave strong guard around you: sleep till day.
 Hark, 'tis the trump! and starlight shows our way.

SCENE VI. *Hachilah. Before the camp of Saul; who is asleep with his warriors. DAVID and ABISHAI stealing towards them, through the wood.*

DAVID.

Judæa's starlight on the camp of Saul!
Stay—till I gaze awhile. Where—where's the king?
Steal soft, I see him now.

ABISHAI.

What! which is he?

DAVID.

He lies within his chariot.

ABISHAI.

Ay, I see!

I hope he's dreaming of those priests at Nob.

DAVID.

His head is bolster'd on his folded robe;
His spear sticks in the turf at his right hand,
His water-cruise beside it.

ABISHAI.

Who lies next?

DAVID.

Know ye not Abner ? In the love of God,
I love that man—and would he more loved me.
The noble Abner is no counsellor,
I 'll stake my honour, of this cursed war,
But loyalty, to him is life itself;
And save Barzillai, lord of Gilead,
There walks no prince upon our holy soil,
So worthy and so model-like a son,
Of brave old Abraham !

ABISHAI.

His loyalty
Is very noble—yet 'tis troublesome.

DAVID.

The Lord be witness, 'tis no fault of mine,
That I am not encamping at his side.
Take now for proof, my hazard. I will go
Alone to Saul—

ABISHAI.

And take his tyrant head,
That God hath given to thy very hand.

DAVID.

The head of God's Anointed ! Palsy me,
If I let slip a far more worthy prize.

ABISHAI.

What could be dearer ? This deep sleep of his,
Is on him, as a miracle from God.

D A V I D .

Thou son of Zeruah, what hot blood,
That lioness hath given all her cubs ;
Thou art untamed as Joab!

A B I S H A I .

Bid me go ;
I 'll nail the giant to the very earth
With his own spear—a second Sisera,
And strike no double blow.

D A V I D .

The damsel Jael,
Is written 'mongst the saints ; Oh name her not
As text for parricide. Such saints as that
Were worthy of old Micah 's teraphim,
And Doeg's adoration. Oh, Abishai,
Who can stretch forth his hand against the king,
And not besprinkle with a leprosy
The withering arm that does so foul a deed !
I tell thee, shouldst thou slay king Saul himself,
His name should live forever ; thine, go down
A rotting regicide's. His tomb should be
A shrine for pilgrimage, and votive flowers,
While thy foul monument itself should crumble,
And unborn generations leave it so,
The squalid corner-stone of strange religion,
The very Bethel of rebellious souls,
And gath'ring-place of sour and peevish men,
Allowing their fore-fathers' deeds of shame,
And filling up their cup of bitterness.

As the Lord liveth, be the Lord alone
 Avenger of this quarrel. Let his day
 Come gently to his gray old hairs at last,
 Or let him fall in battle, as he would ;
 But God forbid my red right hand should shrink
 Its sinews yet, in the eternal flame,
 For venturing on my anointed king !
 I pray thee—see me take the spear away,
 And the small cruse there by his armour-bearer,
 And then taunt Abner with his drowsiness !
 [*Goes towards Saul.*]

ABISHAI.

They do not wake : there's not a sentinel,
 A-stir among them. 'Tis the sleep of death !

DAVID. (*Returning.*)

Come now—here's cruse and spear, and a pure heart
 That beats unblotch'd—I thank the Lord that stayed me !

ABISHAI.

'Tis a good deed! A lesser soul had ta'en
 My first rash counsel : and had come again
 A braggart butcher, to be haunted ever,
 And skulk thro' Earth, all red with parricide.

DAVID.

Let us go on a space. It is a truth
 The bitted rabble are not free to know,
 That loyalty's akin to noble mind,
 That loves some high authority of God,
 To rally round, and champion 'gainst the world.

The vulgar spirit, prating independence,
 Goes lashed thro' life—of slaves the lower slave;
 While, in obedience to what Heaven has ordered,
 High souls are free from masters made of men,
 And so serenely live, and find no chain
 In courtesy to that high gift of God,
 That 's casketed in his anointed one.
 But—halt a moment on this pleasant knoll;
 I see the starlight glancing there behind
 Upon our faithful spears. If worst befalls,
 We 'll bide the worst. Ho, there! thou son of Ner,
 Wake, Abner!—what, art sleeping? ho! there, ho!

ABNER. (*Waking.*)

Stand, and give watchword! Who's a-calling, there?

(MERODACH *shoots an arrow.*)

DAVID.

Oh, is it you, lord Abner? valiant Abner,
 Your eye is vigilant as yon Orion,
 That 's watchman to the stars! Ho, faithful friend,
 How well thou guardest awful majesty!
 There came an outlaw to the royal couch,
 Why didst thou not despatch him? Worthy deed!
 As God's above, ye all should die the death,
 If thus ye keep the Lord's Anointed! See,
 Here are his cruse and spear. God save the king,
 If ye are all his trust!

SAUL.

Is this thy voice

My son, my child, my David!

DAVID.

Mine, oh king.

Oh, wherefore does my lord, pursue his servant;
 What stain is on his hand; what hath he done?
 If it be God's unsounded providence
 That's stirred thee up against me, I will burn
 All offerings of peace, and intercession;
 But, if it be the sons of men, oh king,
 That drive me thus from mine inheritance,
 And fain would slave me to Philistia's gods,
 I curse their cruelty before the Lord.
 It sends me now from my ancestral home,
 And bids me seek from foes, what friends deny!

(An arrow flies near him.)

I pray thee—bid this murderous archer stop!
 Why should my blood be spill'd! I've spared thine own.
 Oh, king, thou art in arms against a fly.
 Why grudge his rocky nest, to a poor bird
 That houses in th' inhospitable cliff,
 And is not worth the dart that flies at him!

SAUL.

Oh, David, I have sinn'd! Pray God for me;
 Return my son—I'll do thee harm no more.
 I have no heart to hate thee; thou art good;
 I've played the fool, and sinn'd exceedingly.

DAVID.

Now therefore, as thy life to me was dear,
 Let my poor soul find favour ev'n from thee.
 Send, of thy youths, oh king, to fetch thy spear.

SAUL.

Blessed of God, be David! Do great deeds,
 And in the end prevail! I'll fight no more.
 Hear me, curst Merodach—yes, Hebrews hear,
 This war is done forever. He shall go
 And come in peace; he's conquer'd me with love,
 And I forgive him. Hear it, Lord above!

DAVID.

Now then, Abishai—quickly—follow me!
 There's one demurs—see, he is stealing forth;
 Now draw we off our followers, or the end
 Will even yet, be bloody.

They pass out; and enter MERODACH with soldiers.

MERODACH.

Where's his track?
 Take him, alive or dead. The king is crazed.
 Ho, look! by Dagon—he has followers!
 See, filing through the valley—how their spears
 Reflect the starlight! I supposed him helpless,
 That he afforded to be so forbearing.
 But well-a-day—we must retreat again;
 And— (Aside.)
 Oh, poor fool—now play we our last chance;
 And all Philistia—shall be, next, the game!

SCENE VII. *Gibeah. The palace-gardens.* DOEG
and JONATHAN.

JONATHAN.

What news of David, Doeg ?

DOEG.

Gone to Gath,
With twice five hundred men !

JONATHAN.

I don't believe it ?

DOEG.

That 's past disputing : 'tis a tale as long
As the old serpent's coil. This Merodach
Dressed in a martial suit, and helm on head,
With an embossed dragon for his crest,
Played love in Maon to a pretty maid,
That loved him for her hero in return.
One day he caught her, in the flowery woods,
And lithed his warrior arm around her waist ;
As she was gathering roses cheerily.
That very day the war was broken up
For Samuel's dying. I was near to him,
And saw the virgin shudder in his clutch,
Like the young dovelet in an adder's hug ;
For, when she saw his was no manly love,
Gods ! how her white arms struggled with his lust,

And bled against the scales of his rough mail !
 I did cry out, myself—and she replied,
 Help me my God, with all thy holy angels ;
 While his hot anger belch'd out very fire,
 And he did look like hell. He wooed her oft
 Beneath her lattice, and she smiled on him ;
 But now she wailed like fair Aholibamah
 When her elf-lover carried her to hell.

JONATHAN.

The Lord preserve her ! how did all this end ?

DOEG.

Compassionating angels helped their sister,
 And God did save his lamb. Ahinoam,
 For that's her name, did call upon the Lord
 Of Rachel and Rebecca—when, by chance,
 Lord David, at a bowshot length, advanced,
 And Merodach did vanish like a snake,
 Leaving the bleeding bird upon the ground.
 But David's soldiers were not far behind,
 And as he ventured near, they caught the knave,
 And made him march with them. The frighted maid,
 Though native of the southern Jezreel,
 Was cousin to the wife of churlish Nabal,
 And fled for refuge to her kinswoman.
 There David found and wedded her ; and now,
 Hath, with his host, retreated unto Gath,
 To live in quiet. That's the whole—my lord !
 I say it, word for word, as I was told ;
 But what Lord David's doing there, I wot not,

I only wish we had him here, just now,
For Merodach is brewing war once more.

JONATHAN.

Enough, poor knave. I'll con this lesson o'er,
My deep suspicion telling all before!

SCENE VIII. *Gibeah. The throne-room in the palace.*

SAUL and JONATHAN.

SAUL.

Where's Abner? David? Where is Merodach?
Oh, who is left me, if these dire forebodings
Prove couriers to stern realities?
God help me in these straits!

JONATHAN.

I'm left thee, father!

SAUL.

Well boy, I know thou canst be valiant sometimes,
Yet art thou sooth at comfort as a maid,
The soothest, and the gentlest, that e'er smiled
Thro' drooping lashes, on my early manhood.
Thy voice reminds me now, of thy fair mother's,
When first, with its own loveliness in love,
The surfeit of her beauty overflowed,

And poured the ethereal lustre of her eyes,
 Into my brave young soul ! I have ta'en courage.
 Feeling her hand, in clouded days thereafter,
 On my crazed brow, to think of that first time.
 Come near me, boy—I said I wanted heroes,
 Who shall I send for, son ?

JONATHAN.

Thy faithful David
 Will come; so thou wilt call him.

SAUL.

Name him not.
 'Tis all too late. Things now must take their course.
 I've grieved perhaps the Holy One away,
 As I have David. I am strong no more
 For quarrel; but I feel no sweet compunction.
 My heart is a sealed fountain ! Oft, I think
 There is a gushing, in its deep-hid caverns,
 But not a prayer wells forth. Let fate have way;
 I shall fall soon; and go before my Judge;
 Perhaps he will be merciful. God wot
 My soul hath need of mercy; but so long
 Have I made tough the sinews of my heart,
 They are stone-hard—I cannot even weep.
 Tears would be gracious: thou art weeping, boy;
 Prithee, shed all for me. My tears are frozen
 And ne'er shall melt again. I've heard of those
 Who travel on the frosty Caucasus,
 That feel themselves congealing, and benumb'd,
 Yet cannot struggle with the icy fiend,

Or scare the vulture, and the high-flown eagle,
 That scream around them as they sink away.
 Ev'n so have I grown cold, and hard, and dead ;
 Dry not thine eyes ; they help my own chill heart,
 That would, but can't o'erflow. Oh, Jonathan,
 Remember God, in these the pliant days
 Of thy fresh youth : it is the seed-time now,
 But autumn is no season to plant grace.
 I feel the days upon me, when the world,
 The sun-light and the moonshine, and the stars,
 Are dimm'd and blurr'd ; and verdant earth, no more
 Doth wear the glory and the glitt'ring dews
 I saw in boyhood. Oh, these days are evil,
 And have no blest succession of bright hours,
 For clouds return, and still are full of rain.
 They need experience of a truer joy,
 In long observed religion. Yes, 'tis true !
 I've learn'd it from a life-time thrown away ;
 And now the honours of my hoary hairs,
 Are blossoms only of the almond tree,
 That shall put off their silver crown, so soon
 As one stong wind blows on them from the Lord,
 Strewing the dust, from which they all have sprung,
 With the corruption of a thousand glories !
 I moralize—but it unloads my mind ;
 Teach it thy babes, and better men perchance
 Shall preach it to the world. No more of that.
 Where 's Merodach suppose ye ?

JONATHAN.

Name him not.

I cannot bear that demon-featured man ;
Ask for thy faithful David.

SAUL.

Name not him !
I cannot—will not stir those coals again.
He 's gone. If I have sinn'd, I don't repent ;
And to recall him were hypocrisy !

JONATHAN.

I'll talk some other time. Your faithful Abner,
Heard rumours of another war last eve,
And bade me say, he went for but a night,
To learn more certain news.

SAUL.

Another war ?
What, David up again !

JONATHAN.

Not David now,
But the whole hell of the uncircumcised !

SAUL.

The Lord forbid—or, give me generals !
I am not fit for war.

JONATHAN.

It may be false.
So said a Moabite that passed last eve,
On which we all took fire ; and Abner fled.

SAUL.

A war would be a whirlwind nowadays.
Think you our David would be one with Gath ?

JONATHAN.

Nay—trust that child of God ! All Dagon's liars
May trump the slander to each wind that blows,
But though all tokens, for a while, should stare
My confidence in face—I'd make strong oath
It could not be the truth.

RUNNER. (*Entering.*)

Oh, good my lord,

SAUL.

Here's news at last—speak out ! whence comest thou ?

RUNNER.

The noble Abner prays you, bid to arms
The hosts of God ; Philistia riseth up
Like a strong thunder-cloud a-muttering,
And coming on the tempest-wing, to sweep
Our Israel like the chaff !—God save the king !

SAUL. (*Rising up.*)

Here's the last tempest my old oak shall stand ;
The very ravens croak the coming crash !

JONATHAN.

Nay—consternation is the hired fore-runner
Of puny things, that come against the mighty.

SAUL.

Lord save us now ! There is no arm of flesh,

For Israel now to lean on. Mine, alas,
Hath the dumb palsy, at the sound of storm.

JONATHAN.

Lean on the Everlasting Arm, oh king !
Count but our God—and thou art passing strong.

SAUL.

Where 's Merodach ?

JONATHAN.

Oh, now ye count the devil !

SAUL.

Devil or seraph, I must have his hand ;
He cost me David, and I 'll have his worth.
Heard you of Merodach ?

RUNNER.

My lord, oh king,
He 's coming with two thousand after him.

SAUL.

Thank God he 's true, then. Haste, go hurry him !
I cannot wait—bid heralds rouse the land.
Let 's know our strength—our weakness, if it be.

(MERODACH *enters.*)

My faithful Merodach !

MERODACH.

I 've posted on,
Before my men, to tell you of my force.
I 've with me nigh two thousand under arms,
And scouts are raising tens of thousands more !

SAUL.

Oh, but this war! how many has Philistia?
 Fights David with them? Where is Abner gone?
 Why comes he not? How soon will be the battle?
 Out, tell me all.

MERODACH.

Cool—cool, my noble liege.

SAUL.

Cool, villain! I am hot at thy delay.
 Speak out the worst.

MERODACH.

Well then, as fast as nonsense,
 The lords of the Philistines roll upon us,
 By hundreds, and by thousands. Abner's out
 Recruiting: he will be with us anon;
 The battle will be joined—when Gath meets Jacob;
 And David is the breeder of this storm,
 And the van-general of the Heathens' armies!

SAUL.

There Jonathan!

JONATHAN.

He lies!

MERODACH.

Lies? draw thy sword.

JONATHAN.

I'll spit upon thy face—not fight thee, liar!
 This is the traitor, king, that bred this war:

This cursed Merodach—and to his face,
I call him knave and devil!

(MERODACH strikes at him, and they quarrel.)

SAUL.

Part them, guards.

What, in the presence!

JONATHAN.

Else he would have slain me!

MERODACH.

I would I had, thou saintly murderer!

JONATHAN.

It was not I broke sanctuary here ;
But I beseech your majesty, permit me,
I'll thresh him with my sheath for drawing blade.

(*They cross weapons.*)

SAUL.

Sheathe both your swords. Lord, has it come to this !
Has the old lion lost so many teeth,
Ye beard him in his lair ! Keep ye apart,
And when this war is ended, sternest justice
Shall arbitrate between ye.

JONATHAN.

But meanwhile,
I tell you that a traitor's in your camp.

MERODACH.

Oh, king !

SAUL.

Peace, peace! I'll hear no more; but now
 I do adjure you by the God of armies,
 Leave this hot broil to be composed hereafter.
 Who dares to break my bond upon ye both,
 He dies by stoning—look ye—like a dog!
 Now, Merodach, say on.

MERODACH.

This is thy son,
 And were I but the traitor that he says,
 I'd die by stoning, and sing triumph-songs,
 But I'd unrib his heart this very moment,
 And show where lurks this lie.

JONATHAN.

I dare thee, fiend!

SAUL.

Heavens! shall this clamour smite my very face;
 Guards, hew them down.

JONATHAN.

Ho! smite, but hear me first!

SAUL.

Nay, I'll hear Merodach tell out this tale
 Of David; speak naught else.

MERODACH.

Then, take away
 These cut-throat guards.

SAUL. (*To Guards.*)
Fall back !

MERODACH.

Now I breathe free!

And let the prince rave on ; I 'll tell of David,
Just where he is, and what the knave has done.
He hies him down to Gath with his two wives ;

SAUL.

Wives !

MERODACH.

Ay, the wife of Nabal for the one,
And a sweet face from Jezreel, the other.
To live with these, he posts him to the heathen,
And leagued with Achish, gets a city from him,
And dwells at Ziklag. There his outlaw spirit
Broke out afresh : and making once a road
On our west border, he persuades the king
The spoils were from Judæa ; which begot
With him such favour that he made him chief
Of Dagon's armies, and his chamberlain !

JONATHAN.

To hear such lying !

MERODACH.

Wait till Abner comes ;
He 'll back the story, king. One taste of war
Sets the young tiger all a-thirst for blood,
And next, the cub turns fangs upon his mother,

Raising Philistia up, from Gath to Ekron,
Against our Israel! He 'll pay thee, king,
For sparing him, that night, at Hachilah!

SAUL.

No mercy now; if but the half be true.

MERODACH.

True? You can almost hear their chariot wheels,
From Hebron here to Gibeah. On they come,
In clouds; I did not think all Palestine
Could belch such hordes against the hosts of God.
They come like locusts, dark'ning all our sky,
Band upon band. 'Tis time to trust me, king!
For northward, to your strongest holds they pass,
Like all the plagues of Pharaoh.

SAUL.

Gracious God,

I fear it is too late!

JONATHAN.

Oh courage, courage!

His words may sound of truth; but what they hint
Is false as hell. Let Pharaoh's locusts come;
The rod of Moses still is left to Jacob:
We 'll raise a wind to hurl them in the sea.

MERODACH.

Baal, what a flourish!

JONATHAN.

Hear him swear by Baal.

(*Enter ABNER.*)

MERODACH.

Here 's Abner, by the gods ! Now tell king Saul
What is become of David ?

ABNER.

Leagued with Gath !
I did not think it could be true of David !

JONATHAN.

Abner—'tis all some master stratagem ;
Judge David when 'tis done.

ABNER.

Nay, Jonathan,
David 's in van-guard of the heathen now,
Marching on Aphek, with his recreant Hebrews.

SAUL.

Aphek ! the war 's got head, if battle-grounds
Are filling up already.

ABNER.

Ay, my lord,
But Merodach and I, are even with them !
Ten-thousand Hebrews, ere to-morrow eve,
Shall pitch their tents on Tabor.

SAUL.

Set them on !

(*Trumpets are heard without.*)

ABNER.

Hark !—ope the lattice.

SAUL.

MERODACH.

(Throws back the casement, and points.)

Yonder in the valley.

See them defile, and thank this Merodach!

SAUL. *(Going to the window.)*

Lord! they pass on by thousands. Jonathan,
 Give hands to Merodach!—come here and look.
 Who rolls that surge to battle—whose the spell
 Of Moses' rod to raise a tide like this?

JONATHAN.

Jannes and Jambres rather!

SAUL.

Oh, 'tis envy.

MERODACH.

He 's but a boy—forgive him!

JONATHAN.

Grant it God,

My soul's foreboding be a boy's suspicion!

SAUL. *(Gazing.)*

I would old Jacob might look down, and see
 His sons a-marching yonder.

JONATHAN. *(Aside.)*

'Tis the end

Of his beginning!

SAUL.

Look my Jonathan,

They bear the banners of his blessing there.

There 's Reuben, with his water-tinted shield,
The van-guard of our strength ; there 's Simeon's crest,
A glitt'ring dagger ! Judah's lion-whelp
Goes rampant after ; who shall lay him down ?
The sceptre shall not pass from Judah's hand,
Till Shiloh come—he cannot be despoiled !
There 's Zebulon with ships upon his folds,
And Issachar's strong ass between his burdens ;
And there 's Dan's serpent in the horse's way,
Biting the heels, that toss the heathen rider ;
Gad, with his troop that shall o'ercome at last,
And Asher with his horn-of-plenty full !
Ho ! there 's the hind of Naphtali, let loose ;
How bounds he to the battle ! God of Joseph
Defend that fruitful bough beside the well,
And let his bow abide in strength forever.
My eyes run o'er—there 's little Benjamin,
The tribe of Saul—the wolf upon his shield ;
How shall he raven, and divide the spoil !
My kin are there. Oh courage, courage all,
It puts new mettle in the soul of Saul,
To see these banners floating once again
And hear the marching trumpet-notes, and men !
My chariots ! have them ready ! Abner, go ;
And Jonathan, let all my captains know.
Brave Merodach, with me to van-guard hie,
Saul in this battle shall be made or die !
Now, God-for-Saul must be the battle-cry !

SCENE IX. *In the rear of the Philistine camp under Apek. A narrow pass, guarded by a sentry. Time, the brown dusk of evening. A soldier in the Philistine attire approaches.*

SENTRY.

Soldier!

SOLDIER.

Philistine!

SENTRY.

Ha! and what art thou?

SOLDIER.

Know ye this ring?

SENTRY.

Pass on.

SOLDIER.

Nay, bid lord David
Attend me here. He holds this post :—is 't not?

SENTRY.

He held it; but, by Rimmon, heard ye not
He 's broke—the villain?

SOLDIER.

I've been foraging ;
Prithee, how came it thus ?

SENTRY.

I always knew it,
But they've just found their wits. This raging Hebrew,
Was fairly dragg'd by Achish to the war,
And I have noted how his soul has sunk,
Since first he trode upon his mother soil,
In Gathite armour! I first told our chiefs,
And when they too had read his traitor looks,
They warned the king of what that look foretold ;
Some deep design to turn on his allies,
And buy his master's favour with our heads.
'Tis late discovery—but they've sent him back :
And his retreat begins, at break of day,
To Ziklag, where he left his twain of wives.
The curse go with him ! 'Tis good riddance sir,
To him, and all his renegades beside.

SOLDIER.

I'd speak a parting malison with him ;
There's an old pledge between us ; bid him here.

SENTRY.

He passed not long erewhile to part with Achish ;
And yonder, or I err, he doth return.

SOLDIER.

Go to thy quarters, fellow! I'll stand guard.
(Sentry goes, and DAVID enters.)

This is the man of valour, is it, sir,
That slew our great Goliath ?

DAVID.

Ay, Philistine !
Hast thou a wound uncured, so old as that,
That thus thou comest in the doubtful twilight,
Like a hired ruffian, to renew the feud ?

SOLDIER.

Nay, Hebrew, but I come to spit on thee
As renegade unto thy God and country,
Fighting for Dagon now, as once thou didst
For the dream deity of Judah's worship.

DAVID.

Now, for that lie against my God and me,
Draw thy vile sword, thou heathen.

SOLDIER.

Hold, apostate,
Do I misjudge thee, by thy Gathite coat,
Or is the liv'ry on thy limbs, a lie ?

DAVID.

It is, by Jacob's God ! I tell it out,
For it hath burned into my soul too long.
Achish had done me kindness—and I came
To plead for him, when, as I can foresee,
He shall scarce buy his life from conquering Saul !
But now be brief, and speak thine errand out ;
If there 's a quarrel to be quashed between us,
Such arbitration is the law of war.
I 'll do this cursed armour off at once,

And shew with my bare breast against thy sword,
There is no spot of treachery on my skin,
Though cruel times have cloaked it with a lie.

SOLDIER.

The Lord's most holy name be blest forever !
David, another wears a lying coat,
(*Throws off his disguise.*)
Dost know thy brother ?

DAVID.

Oh—my mother's son !
My life—my brother—is it thou in truth ?
Then 'tis the answering of a thousand prayers,
For thou hast seen I kept a Hebrew heart,
Though I have eaten of the heathen's bread,
While on the weather-beaten fame of David,
Each veering wind has fresher slanders blown.

JONATHAN. (*Undisguised.*)

Nay—I have known thy faithful heart, my brother,
From every pulse of mine. Come back with me ;
I 'll have my triumph on this Merodach,
For I have pledged mine oath, against his lies,
That God should quit his people soon as thou !

DAVID.

Hath Abner drank the bile of Merodach ?
I pardon him. Has Saul ? it is his humour.
Hath all the host ? 'Tis homage to their chief.
But Jonathan, hadst thou believed me false,
I 'd bid thee spear me, ere I could explain,
And die with looks alone !

JONATHAN.

Doubt not thy brother ;
He knew thy nature on its inner side.

DAVID.

Where march our armies ; and how cam'st thou here ?

JONATHAN.

O'er yonder hills to southward, we have held
An even pace with you. But, for the joy
Of this dear hour, I took my life in hand,
And hither straying, met a Gathite chief,
Who showed me combat, till I wounded him ;
Whereon I spoiled him of his robe and ring,
And have passed safely here. Now come with me ;
Last eve my father called thy name in sleep,
And waking would have called thee louder still,
Had not this Merodach fresh poisoned him.
Oh come, for I would see the dragon writhe,
Pierced with the eye-glance of an honest man !

DAVID.

Nay, Jonathan, I have not sinned 'gainst man ;
But I will pour it in thy faithful ear,
That I have fallen far from innocence,
And peace with God. I cannot now return.

JONATHAN.

Nay—but thou shalt ! how hast thou lost thy peace ?

DAVID.

Oh, I have deadened every holy sense,
For one step backward on our up-hill way

Is downward too. I've lived with godless souls,
 Among the Gentiles; where no Sabbath dawns,
 No festival is hallowed, no sweet chaunt
 Ariseth all the year, nor solemn prayer,
 Responded by the voice of faithful men;
 Where holy Passover, and Pentecost,
 Mark'd by the signs the Lord hath set in heaven,
 Come all uncalendar'd and unsurmised;
 And the green Feast of Boughs, is nameless there.
 Oh, let the Faithful smite me as they will,
 But I will bear such precious balms no more!

JONATHAN.

Come wage the battles of the Faith again!
 Thy name shall be a whirlwind to the fire
 That soon shall blaze upon the Infidel,
 And reap the thorny harvest of their sins.
 God claims thine arm once more.

DAVID.

Go Jonathan,
 For thou art innocent—and thresh these tares!
 My prayer shall be for Saul; and God, no doubt,
 Will bruise Philistia under him again.
 But my sword-arm is manacled, alas,
 And disobedience hath unsinewed me.
 God gives me not the glory of this field,
 Nor will I run unbidden to my bale.

JONATHAN.

Then I must die alone!

DAVID.

Forbid it, Lord !

This is no day to dream disheartening things.

JONATHAN.

Disheartening ? 'tis of all things goodliest
To die, and leave this royalty of God,
No other heir than David.

DAVID.

Lord forbid,

For heaven is witness, that to thee, all eyes
As to an angel of the cov'nant turn,
And promise peace at last to Jacob's seed,
From Jacob's God, when Jonathan is king.

JONATHAN.

'Twas not in vain I had for catechist
The holy Samuel—who hath told me all ;
How he bestowed an unction on thy head,
In rosy youth, that was a changeless seal
Of thy true heirship. This most precious balm,
In all thy fortunes, hath attached unseen
Legions of angels to thy ministry,
That not an hair of thine anointed head
Should fall to earth. And I have sought thee now,
To make bequeathal of my loyalty,
Invoking God to hear my solemn vow,
And give me yet the covetable crown
He keepeth for his saints. For I do swear
With heart and hand to prove thy right to reign,
And champion thy succession 'gainst the world.

D A V I D .

We 'll lodge this matter with ordaining heaven,
And talk it over—many years from now,
When 'twill be less a folly to inquire
Whether such import in my unction lay.
But, oh my brother, for thy David's sake,
Live on, that he may live. Think not of death,
While we for life's worse struggle should grow bold.

J O N A T H A N .

Oh, David, I have learn'd to think on death.
Look up, my brother, at that brilliant orb
Which old Potipherah might marvel at,
With wizard-scroll and all his juggleries,
And tell me if the hand that made Arcturus,
Orion, Mazzaroth and Pleiades,
Hath ne'er a place for us, when we are perfect,
More beautiful than this where we begin.
From worlds we see, I climb to worlds unseen,
And, by strong faith, beholding their delight,
I wish me landed there. There is a land,
Where the good Israelite reposes, sure;
Meads of the holy and the beautiful ;
Isles of the happy in the deep of heaven ;
Where, death's long struggle over, they live life
More dear than Eden's—or blest Araby's,
If half they tell of Araby be true.
There are the prophets, and old poets there,
Enoch and father Abr'am—Abel too,
And Leah tender-eyed, and mother Eve,

And Joseph, and the patriarchs, and the priests,
 And Job, his pious lamentation done,
 And father Samuel in serene repose ;
 And all the holiest and the best beloved,
 Too good for earth, whom we have given to God.
 There dwell they, till the fullness of all time,
 Not for their daily meat harrassing Earth,
 Nor the meek bullock butchering for food,
 But with the bread of angels cheering them,
 And the new wine of heaven !

DAVID.

Grant it, God,

I may prolong eternity with thee
 In such society. 'Tis good to die ;
 To die—and have no more to die, forever ;
 To die, and to be blest ; to be with God :
 But I'm not ready yet for such promotion.
 'Tis hard in this same body not to be ;
 To give up all ; to close one's faithful eyes
 For the last time on sunlight, and no more
 Behold the pleasant world ; to go away ;
 To take eternal leave of all we know,
 For things unrealized ; and from the haunts
 Of our dear youth to vanish ; by sweet stream,
 And shining lake, to be beheld no more ;
 For the last time to see the sun go down,
 Waving a hand half dust for our farewell,
 And know, next evening, it shall gild our grave ;
 To be no more on Earth ; to try new worlds ;
 To float thin essence, and not feel our wings ;

To wander—where ? perchance to be condemned.
 Oh, 'tis of all things sternest and most real,
 This soul's divorce from flesh—this one thing certain.
 When Shiloh cometh, He will tell of death,
 But 'tis a valley where the light is dark,
 And a death-shadow now.

JONATHAN.

As once I roamed
 I lighted on a place called Golgotha,
 Where as I slept, I dreamed of one, on whom
 Our help is laid in that distressful hour.
 Since then I've longed to die—to be at peace,
 And know the end of all this mystery.
 This makes me bold to dare the chasmy leap :
 While underneath I feel th' Eternal Arm,
 I do not fear to die.

DAVID.

Earth binds to earth,
 And scarce from our dark dwelling, can sweet Faith
 With her blue eye up-raised, receive one glimpse
 Of soul-assuring glory. We all fear :
 We talk of heaven—unthinking what we say ;
 Sing of its bliss, but pity those who die ;
 Mourn o'er earth's ills, but would not be relieved ;
 And heave no sigh, nay smile a fond delight
 O'er the poor babe unwombed to certain wo,
 While oh, what floods of bitter tears we shed,
 For the dear embryo born at last above !

JONATHAN.

Weep not for me, my brother, when I'm gone.

I shall be with thee when thou seest me not,
 If, as I think, the spirits of the just
 May come unseen, or visibly to earth,
 For the dear ministry of God to men,
 As other angels do!

DAVID.

Such talk as this
 Will scarce bestead thee, on to-morrows' field,
 And 'tis distrusting God. I'll go with thee
 Beyond the guards, lest some should overhear,
 And tell thee of the trick of Merodach,
 That moved the heathen to this causeless war.
 I pray thee, let the tale be known to Abner ;
 And to thy glorious sire, my rev'rence bear,
 With my firm pledge, to meet him, when at Gibeah,
 We celebrate his triumph. Let me be
 Confronted face to face with Merodach.

SCENE X. *The hills between Gilboa and the sea, overlooking the vallies east and west. Time, early morning; the Hebrew army passing onward. Enter SAUL and MERODACH.*

MERODACH.

Stand here a moment on this hill of Tirzah,
 And gaze on either vale. Dost see yon troops

Defile from Aphek ? David leads those laggards ;
 I know his ensigns. See how brave they float
 Above the renegade ! I bless the Lord,
 That 'tis ev'n so—for traitors are the crevice
 Through which thy driving hosts shall wedge their way,
 And rive their Dagon to a thousand splinters,
 For the hot ire of God. Oh—'tis the hotter,
 Since hired apostates, pair with infidels,
 And match their menace with th' Eternal Arm.

S A U L . .

'Tis a good movement ! mind it in the battle ;
 God will strike with us, when we strike at traitors.

M E R O D A C H .

But now—all spirit, scan the other side,
 And see what holds great nature fortifies,
 That, ere the nightfall, shall be occupied
 By Jacob's children, and defended round
 By Jacob's God ! To-morrow morn, oh king,
 I mean those heights shall glitter, not alone
 With half the dews of Hermon on their leaves ;
 But when the heathen first shall lift their eyes,
 They shall behold the sunrise mirror'd there,
 On burnished spears all bristling, underneath
 The standards of unconquerable Saul.

S A U L .

Hath yonder mount a name ?

M E R O D A C H .

Gilboa, king.

SAUL.

There 's something mountainous in sounding it ;
 Gilboa will tell well of victory.
 The triumph of Gilboa—that 's the word !

MERODACH. (*Aside.*)

He dreams not how defeat will jar its music.

SAUL.

Gilboa—yes, I choose it for my mountain !

MERODACH. (*Aside.*)

'Twill lie a mountain on thy history.

SAUL.

Fought not old Barak near it ?

MERODACH.

Ay, my lord,
 From Endor to Megiddo, Deborah
 The warrior woman chased pale Sisera,
 With his nine-hundred chariots of iron,
 And prancing horse-hoofs, o'er that triumph ground.

SAUL.

We 'll reap another harvest on that field.
 Now in the strength of God I burn for battle.
 Where was it Gideon struck the Midianites ?

MERODACH.

O'er the same fields, my lord, did Gideon triumph ;
 Tabor and green Esdrelon, are already
 The glory grounds of Israel's Sabaoth :

And there that ancient river Kishon too,
Swells for the foe once more.

SAUL.

Now laud to God !

Gilboa's name is still reserved to Saul,
And 'tis magnanimous in sound as any.
Where Gideon, Barak, Deborah and Jael,
Have won God's battles, Saul cannot be conquer'd ;
Where Kishon's self hath fought for Israel,
And stars in their bright courses turned the fight
From Sisera and all his rampant horse,
To Jael and her hammer—Lord forbid
King Saul should quail in spirit, to shew fight
To hell itself let loose on such a ground.
On to Gilboa !—how I love the sound.

[Rushes down the heights.]

MERODACH.

It hath no meaning now ! How fresh in air
Its misty heights lie all before thee, king.
On, to find out at last, how false and vain
This morning vision through deceitful vapour,
Shows to thy greedy eye. Oh, tall Gilboa,
How art thou ready to be made a name,
At which the pious Israelite shall start,
And shuddering tell his prayers ! Most noble heights,
A flood is swelling towards you in the hearts
Of these brave men, a-marching all so bold,
That, ere two suns go down, shall stain for aye
Your deep-blue sides, with an eternal red ;

And peaks that ever since creation's day,
Morning and evening have been beautiful,
But, in their innocence, unnoticed all ;
Shall grow sonorous in the mouths of men,
With choruses of oaths, and sighs, and tears,
As they begin to be related of,
Now in the land's decay ! Here, yet shall come
The wand'rer on his camel, and look on
From this same mount, with thousand histories,
Up-swelling in his soul ; and there below,
The ragged shepherd shall be trolling out
Ballads of this hot day, as far he drives
From yon sad hills, his all unheeding flock.
Gilboa shall be shunned ; nor dew, nor rain,
Shall, in their superstition, ever fall
On that curst mountain, where God left king Saul :
And—tell it not in Gath, the world shall say,
How there his mighty shield was cast away.
Hear not my mutt'ring ! but my deepest mind
Marvels to see how bold can be the blind.

ACT V.

SCENE I. *Gilboa. SAUL on the heights. The Philistine hosts encamped in the valley of Esdrelon, below ; troops still coming in. Mount Carmel in the distance, westward.*

SAUL.

Banner on banner bright,
The moon of Ashtoreth, and Remphan's star,
And spearmen like a forest,
Horde upon horde of Heathen,
Lord how thy foes roll on !
I hear their distant horse-hoofs,
Each, prancing on my heart.
From Gath they prance, and Edom,
Untamed, untameable ;
Oh crush them, GOD, once more !

O'er yon low line of hills,
I hear the mutter of their gathering ;
And tremble 'gainst my will.
How can I bear my spirit up,
While Israel's poor defence

Comes rippling feebly in,
A water-course, against an ocean's surge.

Yet, not a crag is here
But tells of our old fame,
Gotten of old, upon the Infidel.
Gilboa's heights alone
Are left my sword to glorify ;
And they henceforth, I swear it God,
Shall lift unto the clouds,
The name of thine avenger,
Thine own Anointed Saul !

Tabor, thy fortress top
Tells of old Barak's power,
And that delirious day of victory,
When, from its peaks, flashed down
The sword of Judah to devour its foes.
Esdreton—flowery vale,
Where couchant now in dreamy rest,
The hind of Naphtali reposes,
How many bones beneath
Thy copsy swells are laid !
Bones, that might rise and tell
How trembled every acre that red day,
When, thundering from afar,
The Hebrew chased pale Sisera,
With his nine-hundred charioteers,
To sad Megiddo's bound :
Yea, how yon twining stream,

Swelled with Jehovah's rage,
 As if, unseen, the rod of Moses waved
 And sunk his iron wheels.
 There is the stream as then ;
 Thy stream old Kishon, venerable river,
 But half his prowess sleeps beneath thy flow.

Tabor and Hermon, then
 How did your cliffs toss back
 The rumbling of retreat,
 The rattle of pursuit,
 And its wild thirsty cry !
 Son of Abinoam,
 Taanach's young mothers
 Still tell it their babes,
 How, down from mount Tabor,
 When Deborah beckoned thee,
 Glanced thy bright spear, and blared thy shrill trumpet,
 And dashed thy ten thousand,
 Like tigers that pounce from their caverny lair.

Pictures still shew it,
 In Canaanite temples :
 How Sisera saw thee
 And fled on his feet from thy glitter afar.
 The books of the Judges
 Write Jael with the blessed,
 Whose tent he sought, weary
 And faint from the war.
 Her beautiful hand
 Thrice raised the huge hammer,

And nailed on the brow of the sleeper,
The slumber of ages beside.

Mother of Sisera,
Dreaming, I've seen thee,
Thy white bosom beating,
Thy far glances stretching
From Harosheth's castle,
In hope of thy son.
Then would it, changefully,
Seem thy sweet picture,
Mother of Saul,
In the brown of the eventide waiting me,
There at thy lattice, afar.

As thou waitest and lookest in vain,
How lonely, one after another,
The stars come out in the sky!
Thou think'st my poor soul is among them,
But thy fears thou utterest never;
Still sighing, as swell up the breezes,
Hark, hark—he is coming—my son!

(A raven flies near, cawing.)

Thy ladies respond thee with comfort,
But the tears on thy cheek are not dried.
And so I beheld in my dream,
And thought—in Esdrelon the while,
And here, on Gilboa,
The battle was over,
And infidels sung o'er thy warrior child.

Nay—let me fling the tatter'd flags
 Of our old victories,
 To the fresh air, with better trust in God !
 I shame me to be pale of eye ;
 Ye souls of mighty heroes,
 From your repose, look down
 Upon a son that will not shame his sires.

(The raven passes, cawing.)

Poh, I dont hear thee, bird !
 But there 's a blackning cloud,
 Sweeping from northward Lebanon,
 Where the cold glaciers freeze its rain to snows !
 Thunder this way, ye storms,
 With lightning and with hail,
 The old artillery of Israel,
 Against the foes of God.
 The scene grows very wild !
 Caw—caw ye birds away,
 Wheel—croak your worst at me,
 Phrensy itself shall make me conquerless.

(A hag approaches.)

Who's this with her red hood,
 Her black eyes peering under ?
 A Memphian, she should be,
 By her dry mummy features ;
 And she is weary from foot-journeying,
 And wary, too, I ween.
 Ho, then, old hag, I've caught thee !

Come hither, and respond me
 Out of thy dusty mouth,
 What may'st thou be ?

HAG.

A Gipsy, sir—God save ye, I'm a Gipsy,
 That, tired of chewing leeks,
 Have followed Moses' tracks,
 Towards milk-and-honey land.
 But now I'm faring back to onions, sir,
 Heart-sick of answering you runaways,
 For Pharaoh's deeds, afore my dam was born,
 In my poor worn-out body.

SAUL.

Well, well-a-day ! I took thee for a witch ;
 The crows keep wheeling round that hood of thine,
 And their caw-cawing seems familiar to thee.

HAG.

Now—by Osiris, they are wise as vermin,
 Quitting this tumble-down autocracy,
 Ere heaven falls in upon it.

SAUL.

What dost mean ?

HAG.

Oh, crows know when to caw, and by their croaking,
 I know there's evil brewing in the air.
 I'm in a hurry—but if you 're the king,
 (*SAUL draws his sword.*)
 Come, don't suppose you scare me—I advise

Your majesty to put your iron back,
And learn of some old woman what to do.

SAUL.

Thou wither'd hag ! what means thy bitter heart,
Out of thy one-tooth'd jaw ?

HAG.

Ha-ha—ha-ha !

What would you pay to see old Samuel ?
Ask Captain Merodach—may Heaven help thee !
Caw-caw, ye rooks ; now my old hood goes on,
And I go too—Saul shall not see me more.

*(Leaps down a crag with wild laughter ; and birds fly
up screaming.)*

SAUL.

Oh, what suggestions of the Evil One,
That hag puts in my brain ! I'll roll down rocks
Upon her cursed head—There, bow! away !
*(Rolls down a boulder, which crashes below : a scream ;
and ravens fly up, cawing.)*

See Samuel once again ? would God I might !
I'm half a-wilder'd with this mystery.

(MERODACH approaches.)

Ha, Merodach ! What trick from hell is this ?
Thou art the fiend familiar of this hag ;
Oh, die thou devil !

[Seizes him by the throat.]

MERODACH.

Off, unhand me, sir !

(They wrestle ; the king seizing a young tree, holds MERODACH over the cliff with the other arm.)

SAUL.

I've half a mind to drop thee after her.

MERODACH.

Drop me ?—look to thyself, thou reprobate !

(The rock on which the king stands, suddenly loosens, and crashes away down the cliff. MERODACH springs to a firm rock, while the king, clinging to the tree, hangs over the precipice.)

SAUL.

Help me to land, sir !

MERODACH.

Sire, the tree is giving,

And you'll land soon enough without my help.

SAUL.

I see 'tis breaking : I'll not ask again.
 Snap, faithless tree !—but thou art over-charged,
 And art not faithless !—there—give, give a moment :
 When I shriek out my soul, curst Merodach,
 Hear it forever—'tis my legacy ;
 Now shiver—splinter—break, long-suffering twig,
 Sole friend that breaks for Saul, and dieth with him :
 There—Save me now, my God !

MERODACH.

Your hand, my lord.

(As the tree snaps, SAUL catching the hand of MERODACH leaps to the rock.)

SAUL.

Shall I forgive thee ?

MERODACH.

Nay—best try once more
To drop me o'er the cliff.

SAUL.

Stay—did I that ?
Your hand again : we 're quit !

MERODACH.

Now, good my lord,
I had a tale about the hag that scared you,
When your kind salutation throttled me.

SAUL.

My sudden phrensy—think not sorely of it ;
I 'm not myself at times.

MERODACH.

This hag 's Egyptian,
Sent from the heathen yonder, to do mischief.
The soldiers pelted her with stones, and curs'd her,
For Pharaoh's sins against our ancestry ;
On which she breathed unmeaning prophecies,
Disheartening half our host.

SAUL.

Her very eye
Fell on me like a palsy.

MERODACH.

Poh, brain-sickness !

She's roamed these northern coasts this many a year,
With her red hood ; I know the crazy creature !
In my hot youth, I will confess it, king,
I was an outlaw in this mountain region,
And flying once a furious pursuit,
Reached the far Caucasus, and spent long years
Hunting the wild-goat on its frozen cliffs. . . .
Upon a peak, one day, I spied this woman ;
There was a chasm betwixt us, up from which
The far-flown birds were hovering through the clouds,
And she was mutt'ring her strange fancies to them.
As I beheld her, in that solitude
Of mountain and of clouds, I own I trembled,
And, turned to stone, stood rigid 'neath her gaze,
Powerless to fly the arrow which I drew,
And aimed in my strong bow. She only laughed,
And bade me, if I'd meet no ill for it,
Hie home at once, and seek the Witch of Endor,
And then she leaped upon a vulture's back,
And darted down beneath the clouds below.

SAUL.

Where lives the witch ?

MERODACH.

I have not seen her lately ;
But then I found her in a cave at Endor,
Where—she did bid me fetch thy royal head

Within three moons, and lay it at her feet ;
 For then thine edict was fresh given forth,
 To put away enchanters from the land.
 Believe me—I, on this, did bless myself,
 And said the Holy Name ; and then to 'scape
 The meshes she was stretching for my soul,
 I vowed obedience—and betook myself
 With my uncouth behaviour to king Saul,
 In whose blest service I have been secure,
 And all forgot the perils I have passed,
 Until this awful day !

SAUL.

'Tis awful, truly.

But now I 'm pleased to learn thy history,
 Which hath been oft a riddle unto me.
 Lives then this witch at Endor, even now ?

MERODACH.

They say indeed, that still this devil's dam
 Keepeth her cave. Your armour-bearer, Doeg,
 Told me he sought his fortune there this day ;
 And I surmised from what I gathered of him,
 She is no very evil sort of person.

SAUL.

Seek if she hath indeed a sprite familiar.

MERODACH.

Oh yes, and Endor is hard by.

SAUL.

SAUL.

Inquire

If it be so indeed.

MERODACH.

I'll learn, my lord.

Let me entreat you, shun this evening air :
 And take good rest. These northern country dews
 May rheum the arm on which we all rely,
 When yon Philistines raise the battle-cry.

SCENE II. *Another part of the mountain.* ABNER and
 JONATHAN.

JONATHAN.

Good even, Abner !

ABNER.

Bless thee, gentle cousin.

JONATHAN.

How goes it with my father, since I left ?

ABNER.

He goes with Merodach—and so goes ill.
 I'm of thy mind at last. If he's chief-captain,
 This war's already done. You cannot trust him,
 He walks, and mutters, and he looks awry,

As I ne'er saw an honest Hebrew do.
 Would God we had our David! Hast thou found him ?

JONATHAN.

Ay—found him, like a wedge of purest gold,
 Untarnished 'mid the rubbish where we 've cast him.

ABNER.

Is it not true, that tale of Merodach's ?

JONATHAN.

True ? never were two twins more congruous
 Than my convictions to discovery !
 Oh, where's the vein in thy most noble heart,
 That beats with blood so easily corrupted
 By that deceiver's venom. Thy true friend,
 The faithful David, sends thee grief's own glance,
 Reproaching thee, that years of faithful love
 Speak not so loudly to thy memory,
 As one curst whisper in thy ready ear,
 From such a knave as Evil-Merodach !

ABNER.

I shame me for my dull facility,
 For I have found, at last, this Merodach
 Doth lie in every word. But yet 'tis strange ;
 David sojourn'd with Achish, and is here
 Encamping with the heathen.

JONATHAN.

Noble Abner,
 Though now 'tis custom thus to pile damnation

Upon the suff'rer, for th' oppressor's crime,
 Enforced full oft on most unwilling souls,
 I do suspect, when those great books of God
 Shall be unrolled, the shame of all this sin,
 Shall stand on our account, who drove a man
 More righteous than ourselves, to find with foes,
 The mercy that the sons of God denied.

ABNER.

Ay, God forgive us—I believe it too ;
 The ravens have been gentler with our dove,
 Than his own proper mates.

JONATHAN.

Now learn a tale,
 That makes my sword athirst for Merodach.
 What peace we've had, we've owed to David only,
 For this beseeching angel sowed the soul
 Of Achish, with the kind transplanted grace
 Of our religion—and had kept at bay
 Our foes forever, had not Merodach
 Gone down disguis'd, and spurred them to the war.

ABNER.

Then Satan drives his drudge two ways at once ;
 For surely Merodach hath filled our ranks,
 And serves with spirit still.

JONATHAN.

The end will shew ;
 I fear he'll prove some engineer of hell,
 For this curst badger works all under ground,

And the huge breast-work that he piles above
 Whate'er it seem, is but the greater weight
 To gulf us all the sooner, with his mine.

ABNER.

We have ourselves to blame for all this sapping ;
 Where 's David now ?

JONATHAN.

Cashier'd, and gone to Ziklag.

He trode Judæa with an aching foot,
 Contriving how to separate from Achish,
 Without repaying with ingratitude
 The hospitable foe. All this beheld
 The lords of Gath, and all Philistia too,
 Crying—king Achish, thou art surely mad
 To bring this fellow into camp with us ;
 He'll make the Hebrew virgins dance again,
 And kill ten men, for every tithe of Saul.
 So said they—and prevailed; he blessing God,
 Went back to wrestle for us in his prayers.

ABNER.

If Merodach 's the traitor that appears,
 We must keep watch beside him in the fight,
 And hew him down, if he doth waver there.

JONATHAN.

Yes, tell it not the king ! Oh, guard him well ;
 And bear my duty to my royal father.
 I'm bidden with the out-posts serve to-night,
 And I am glad he shall not see his son :

For, Abner, I've dire fears, from all I learn,
 And would not that the wrinkle on my brow
 Should tell how all my spirit works within,
 To find some hope rewarding faith and prayer,
 And my unshaken trust in Jacob's God.

ABNER.

Good night, my noble youth. Come weal, come wo,
 Thy sword, with my sword, shall give blow for blow !

SCENE III. *A cave of Gilboa. Time, near midnight.*
SAUL and his officers asleep. Thunder and lightning
without. ABNER wakes.

ABNER.

How the king labours in his sleep! Such nights
 Come oft vaunt-couriers to distressful days.
 God send it not so now. He's muttering
 Now Merodach—now David—and i' faith,
 He dreams himself in battle. How it lightens!
 A storm's got tangled in the thunder-cliffs
 Of Carmel yonder. Hear it not, poor king;
 There's storm forever in thy spirit's sky.
 What! blessed Ark! he calls Ahimelech!
 The king's light-headed. Merodach, wake up;

What, here—asleep? Ho, wake up, Merodach!
 Good angels! he's a-palsied—cold, stiff—dead
 By all that's holy! Ho, Amasa there!
 Wake there, Amasa!

AMASA. (*Waking.*)

What—what!

ABNER.

Hist, be still!

Hand me the cruse of water. Quick, don't speak:
 For God's sake, silence; do not wake the king;
 Hand here!

AMASA.

What is it?

ABNER.

Dash it on his temples.

Something's the matter with this Merodach;
 Take hold his hands.

AMASA.

Heaven help us—they are cold,
 He's gone by all that's blessed.

ABNER.

Say it not;

Slit up his vest; pour water on his bosom.

AMASA.

Water a stone! he's not to die to-morrow.

ABNER.

Oh Lord, what 's here ? look, look for love's sake, look ;
Who did this damned deed ? Who 's stabbed him ? see,
Two—three broad gashes ! Look whose sword is red.

AMASA.

Nay, stop ! no blood is here ; these wounds are old !
Hold down the lanthorn—shade it from the king !
By the old serpent, look ! old musty wounds,
What shall we make of this ?

ABNER.

The face may tell.

AMASA. (*Looking at the face.*)

The priest Ahimelech's misused body !
Good angels help us, can the evil spirit
Thus, by his magic, use our earthen vessels
When we have left them empty ! Gracious God,
What evils dog the house of poor old Eli !
What shall we do ?—we've comraded with hell,
While Merodach's been with us.

ABNER.

Hist—oh hist !

Bear off his reverend body ; we must make
This midnight burial, hallow'd as may be ;
But not a noise—the king must sleep thro' this,
Or he sleeps ne'er again. There is a pit
Ten paces off, we scraped to hide our treasure,
And there this sacred treasure will we lay,
Alone with God : lift—bear him soft, Amasa !

*(They lay the body in the pit, and cover it with the
mould, saying prayers.)*

AMASA.

This is no worthy burial for a priest,
Whose spirit long hath dwelt in Paradise.

ABNER.

I mark the grave, with this unworthy stone,
And, when this miracle is clearly told,
Will make more meet memorial.

AMASA.

Wonderful,
Who put this body here ?—where 's Merodach ?
How comes he gone, and this stale corpse instead ?

ABNER.

Say nothing ! Merodach looked very like
The priest Ahimelech.

AMASA.

Two twins not more !
Some cursed trick to fright king Saul, I fear.
Think you the rogue has left us, and brought here,
The fester'd body of Ahimelech,
To sink the king's poor courage ?

ABNER.

Hark, what 's that ?
What makes this flapping !

AMASA.

Turn thy lanthorn up !

ABNER.

A huge black bat ! flap-flap—it sees us not !

AMASA.

This is a cave of devils.

THE BAT. (*Flying about.*)

Au—au—au !

ABNER.

'Tis Asmodeus ! Wake the king, and quit !
But oh, look natural—don't stare—don't wonder.
Better all devils of the pit against us,
Than this strange story in the king's suspicion !

THE BAT.

Ha-ha ! ha-ha !

AMASA.

He laughs like Merodach !

ABNER.

Oh gracious Lord, that cursed laugh tells all !
Sathan had power o'er Job's poor bone and flesh ;
And, deep perchance, o'er old Ahim'lech's too,
And hath, within it, been incorporate.

THE BAT.

Ha-ha !

ABNER.

Avaunt !

SAUL. (*In his sleep.*)

Who's there ?

ABNER. (*Aside to AMASA.*)
Put out the light!

SAUL. (*Waking.*)
God for his ark, and for the sword of Saul!
(*Thunder and lightning.*)
Nay, but where am I? Storm upon Gilboa?
Abner, awake—what's all this howl? wake up.

ABNER. (*Pretending to wake.*)
The thunder of the captains, and the shouting!
What's this? ho, I've been dreaming: save thee, king!
'Tis but the middle watch; let's sleep again!

SAUL.
There's a storm brewing; hear the wind—'tis fearful!
There's the big rain a-pattering on the leaves;
Something's a-flapping round us, over-head;
A light! I cannot sleep! 'tis terrible.

ABNER.
What's terrible in tempest? God doth hold it
In hollow of his hand.

SAUL.
I will not sleep:
I've had a fearful dream. There's lightning—see it!
Thrice hath it thunder'd—now it roars again,
And a tall cedar's blazing on yon cliff,
The blasted type of Saul! I will not sleep.
The chariots of th' Unnameable come down;
Pray God, he fights for us!

SAUL.

ABNER.

Let Achish tremble !
When did God's thunder not avenge his people ?

SAUL.

I've had a bitter dream.

ABNER.

Oh, dreams are phantoms.

SAUL.

The phantoms oft of most substantial sins,
Reflected in the burnish'd recollection !
I saw that grisly terror, old Ahim'lech,
As when at Ramah he did prophesy,
Crying—thine hour is come.

ABNER.

A mere rememb'rance ;
Dreams are sleep's mem'ry.

SAUL.

Dreams are oracles !
My prayers are throttled in their very birth,
They have no wings ; they mount not ; I 'm cast off.
The venerable prophet rose at last,
Such as I saw him in my better days,
And I besought his blessing—but methinks,
He did, that moment, first begin to speak,
When broke the horrid thunder—and he vanish'd.
Oh, could I see him—could I live life over !
But where is Merodach ? I would to God,
David were nigh, instead.

ABNER.

Poh, what ! the harper ?

SAUL.

I taught thee that vile name : I take it back.
Abner, the harper is a fighter too :
There 's not a hero in my marshall'd host,
Can quarrel at his side.

ABNER.

Not ev'n the king,
The damsels say ;—how then can we poor captains ?

SAUL.

Oh, Abner, mock not now ! Go call the priests ;
Zadok has found a chapel in the cave,
And keeps a vigil. Have him hitherward.
Here comes old Gad, the seer !

(*The SEER enters.*)

Hast thou, for us,
Some message, hoary sire ? I learn, thou cam'st
From Moab hither, to implore for me.

SEER.

Nay, with the burden of the Lord, I come,
To say he gives no oracle to Saul,
And to beseech thee, for our Israel's peace,
Repent betimes.

SAUL.

Out, with thine horrid eye,
Thou walking sepulchre of hope and joy !
Who sends thee here, to antedate, with looks,

The wrath of God ? Go, scare the Moabites ;

(Enter ZADOK with Levites.)

And say, good Zadok, for in thee I trust,
What is the message of the Lord to Saul ?

ZADOK.

Alas ! my king, the burden of the Lord
By priest and prophet must be still the same.
All night have I stood praying unto God,
But not a voice responds a word for thee.

SAUL.

Confederation ! Thank Saul's clemency
That Nob's red graves boast not a Gad and Zadok.
Begone ; ye do not fright me with your tricks !
I can be priest myself. I'll go and pray.

[Goes aside.]

ABNER. *(To ZADOK.)*

How awful 'tis to be cast off of God !
Saul's soul hath been in torment, all the night ;
He waked me with his muttering ; thrice he started,
And called now Merodach, now Samuel,
And sometimes David. 'Twas an awful sight,
To see the reaming sweat upon his forehead !
Hark ! how it thunders. Here he comes again.

SAUL. *(Returning.)*

Heaven thunders No ! I must see Samuel.

ABNER.

Rest his dear soul with God ! How wilt thou see him ?

SAUL.

Come, if thou dar'st, and learn.

ABNER.

Whither, my lord ?

SAUL.

Dost think, my Abner, that a dead man's ghost
Can talk with earth ?

ABNER.

What may not God allow ?

SAUL.

Come on, then ; never fear !

ABNER.

To see a spirit ?

SAUL.

Stay, if thou art a coward.

ABNER.

How it pours !

Kishon to-morrow will o'erflow its banks,
And swell, as once of yore.

SAUL.

Then, let it swell.

This eve, I look'd upon Philistia's hosts
Encamping in the valley, and I felt
Like a spent swimmer, in old Noah's time,
Perch'd on a rock, in vain. Who thinks of rivers,
With such an ocean swelling underneath ?

A B N E R .

Stay—till the rain be less.

S A U L .

Nay, let the torrents
Be never less, till day. 'Twill lay the dust,
And save our throats a-choking in the fight !

(Thunder and lightning.)

A B N E R .

Your majesty must not go forth, while thus
God's thunders fly around these echoing peaks.
Thou art too tall a palm to crown these crags,
On such a night as this.

S A U L .

A curse on cowards !

Don't follow me, nor ask me whitherward.
I tell thee, Abner, hell itself, to-night,
Shall ope her horrid jaws, and answer me
The secret things, that Heav'n so long denies,
Tho' Samuel's self should stir his bones, and rise !

[Goes out.]

A B N E R . *(Following.)*

The king is crazy, we must after him !
What's his wild project now, no wit can tell,
But 'twill not do, to leave him raving so ;
Where Saul rests, I will rest—where he goes, go.

SCENE IV. *Cavern of the witch of Endor. A blue fire burning in a tripod; THE WITCH stirring it. A Philistine CHIEF. The bat flies in.*

THE BAT.

Au-au—au-au!

WITCH.

What, back again already?
Thou hast not sped.

THE BAT.

Au—au.

CHIEF.

Good woman, prithee!
If you must talk to bats instead of me,
You 'll scarcely earn your wages. If you 've ought
To tell king Achish, come, make no delay,
It wears past midnight.

WITCH.

Oh—the vampyres eat thee!
Canst thou not wait a minute? Burn fire, burn!
Seven! seven times seven!—Look hard upon the wall,
Stare at the circle!

CHIEF.

What, that great green snake
A-biting off his tail ?

WITCH.

I 'll make it soon
A pleasant picture-frame. Look steadfastly
For magic perspective.

CHIEF.

Thou blear-eyed hag,
'Tis all the frame of nothing.

WITCH.

Look, and start not.
Seven—seven times seven.

CHIEF.

Come—'tis all a trick,
I'm gaping at the rugged cavern-wall,
Twined with a great dried snake.

WITCH.

Now, not a word !

(Sings.)

Fume, fume aconite,
Hellebore burn bright,
Mingle, mingle, smoke and flame,
Slave, tell me all I claim !

CHIEF.

What's that she mutters—who 's she muttering at ?

I see a set of features in the smoke,
Smoky as it ; 'tis her familiar spirit.

WITCH. (*Singing.*)
Now, Lilith and Asmodai,
Answer once more.
Smoke tripod and censer,
And fume hellebore !

*She places the tripod before the circle on the wall, and it
begins to fume thickly.*

CHIEF.
Madam, be quick with this !

WITCH.
Now mortal, look !
Look while I count a thousand, and hold out
This wand, and tell me what thou seest : look.

CHIEF.
See ? I see nothing : yes—the smoke grows fine,
And thick, and settles now within the ring.
Ho, it is clearing of its films apace,
As breath dries off a mirror. Now—by Baal,
I see broad moonlight, and a knoll of trees ;
Thou art a glorious witch—the very leaves,
Do shine and glitter with the evening dews,
And shiver in the breeze. A noble picture.
Like day-beams through a crevice in a dungeon,
That paint things upside-down—oh, wondrous witch,
Thou mak'st live landscapes.

WITCH.

Seest not David, now ?

CHIEF.

Oh, it grows clear ! There are Amalekites,
Dancing and feasting, 'mid the spoils of war :
I see two ladies, that appear as captives
In Hebrew ornaments, and bride attire ;
These fellows have been fighting.

WITCH.

Look for David.

CHIEF.

Ay, in the shade, upon a knoll behind them,
I see the Hebrew now, as 'twere beside me ;
He spies them out, crouching beneath the trees,
And looking fiercely at the moonlight revel ;
There 's menace in his gesture. Had he men,
I think he'd fall upon them ! Glorious witch !

WITCH. (*Continues counting.*)

Four hundred ninety-nine !—Look sharp behind him.

CHIEF.

By Rimmon, yes, his Hebrew renegades,
Are skulking close in rearward. Stir thy fire,
For it grows fainter now. I'd see this out ;
There 'll be a moonlight battle there anon.
Don't count so fast, thou hag ! The picture fades,
But it grows larger ; now I see their faces.
These are lord David's wives, by Ashtoreth ;
And I divine these villains, in his absence,

Have set on Ziklag, and have ta'en them captive,
 With all these loads of spoil. Poh, now it breaks,
 Your perspective is almost good for nothing.
 Don't count so fast, thou most atrocious witch ;
 Patches of smoke, like mists that break away,
 Go o'er the mirror ! Stir thy censer, hag ;
 There 's a big face, a-wavering to and fro,
 David's—as large as life ! now all 's dry wall.

WITCH.

One thousand ! There—begone.

CHIEF.

What ho, is 't done ?

WITCH.

Go tell king Achish, by this perspective
 I've watched the Hebrew since he left the camp.
 'Tis as thou deem'st. Ziklag is burnt with fire ;
 When David reached his home, 'twas dust and ashes ;
 Food for my friend that goes upon his belly !

THE BAT.

Au—au !

WITCH.

And David and his soldiers wept ;
 Such groans from soldiers never came before.

CHIEF.

Couldst hear, as well as see ?

WITCH.

Ay, doubt it not .

This cavern hath an ear, besides its eye,
 And I, as 'twere the brain of this great mountain,
 Dwell in the rock, conversing with the world.
 Ziklag's was but a stubble-blaze, to what
 Far as the coasts of Japhet, hath been seen
 Within this hollow hill—a gorgeous town
 Begirt ten years by heroes, burned at last,
 And a great kingdom spoiled! They groaned at Ziklag;
 But—I forgot—they howled at Ilion.

CHIEF.

What more of David?

WITCH.

In the victors' track,
 He followed hotly, till two hundred men
 Did, at the ford of Besor, quite give o'er;
 Yet with the rest he sped, and found anon,
 A gipsy lad, that of a raging fever,
 Lay by the road-side dying. By his liv'ry
 They knew he served a chief of Amalek;
 And when they gave him fruit, and cooled his tongue,
 He did revive, and showed them whitherward
 The army passed that left him there to die.
 And thus came David to the place we saw,
 O'ertaking them in mirth and revelry.
 There 'll be a battle: for he only waits
 Till they are well debauched, and sunk in sleep,
 To give them a surprise. Poor wretch, how long
 He hath been worried! Let him chafe awhile;
 'Twas our last chance—and saddest of his woes:
 But night is ever thickest at its close.

CHIEF.

Well-done ! here's the full purse I pledg'd thee, witch ;
Thou 'st shewn me all its worth.

WITCH.

Avaunt thee, quick !
Quit the weird cavern, for the air grows thick.
[*He goes out.*]

THE BAT.

Au-au !

WITCH.

Yes, Asmodeus, I'll attend thee.
(*Stirs the fire in the tripod.*)
Now, my familiar friend, we 'll talk together,
Only, I pray you, look the gentleman
That you've been playing lately. Doff the bat !

(Sings.)

Come, in the fume of hell,
Come, and what I ask thee, tell,

(Stirs the censer.)

Oh burn thee, devil ! must I say it over ?

(Sings.)

When Saul, the witch-destroyer,
Himself a witch shall sue,
Bear witness, scribe and lawyer,
My soul is Sathan's due.

There—wilt not come, unless I sing it all?
Come then, in fancy trim, as Merodach.

(Sings.)

'Twas seal'd with red blood
From my heart that did come,
And daubed on the shark-skin
With digit and thumb!

Now I throw in the herb called adder's-wort,
And we'll have smoke enough to sneeze a demon.

(It thunders, and she sings.)

The winds rave and roar
And the skies cleave asunder;
'There's lightning once more,
And bursts the big thunder.

There's something broken in the charm to-night;
I cannot work without thee: Spirit, come.

*The tripod fumes, and in the smoke appears a phantom
like MERODACH.*

PHANTOM.

'Tis done—'tis done,
We've won—we've won!

[Vanishes.]

WITCH.

Ha-ha! the battle will go ill to-morrow.

HUNCHBACK. *(Entering.)*

Please you, some Hebrew soldiers wait without,
To know their fortunes.

WITCH.

Fire-pains on that Doeg!

He hath been prating of us to the camp ;
 And all the soldiers will be trotting hither,
 Till furious Saul shall track me through the mud,
 And hang me, as they say he hang'd old Huldah.
 Go, hunchback, curse them! Say I am not here.

HUNCHBACK.

They sent a solemn oath unto the clouds,
 They would not tell of anything they saw ;
 And—by the lightning—they have gold a-plenty.

WITCH.

Bid them come in. Out fire ; be dark as death.

*(Darkness.)*A VOICE. *(In the distance.)*

Farewell—farewell!

WITCH. *(Aside.)*

There spoke some body's angel,
 Bidding last leave. Who treads my threshold now?

SAUL. *(In the distance.)*

Oh I'm alone with shadows and with darkness.
 That thunder stunned me. Did I hear a voice ?
 Go back ; who's this that dogs me i' the dark ?
 That 's a curst whisper—Merodach, is't thou ?

ABNER. *(Following.)*

Your faithful Abner—but there's something else

That makes me shudder : and a patting hoof
Sounds quick beside me, and a bat's wing flaps.

SAUL.

Go back, poor coward. Ho! is there no light?
Ho, here! who keeps this toll-gate to the pit?

ABNER.

You've introduced me to the home of Fear,
Now first I know what 'tis. I'll turn away.
Come back with me, I pray you in God's name.

WITCH. (*Singing.*)

Who speaks that name, must not come here;
Who walks this dark must know no fear.

ABNER. (*Going.*)

Then I'll turn back—I'm loyal to the death,
But by God's leave, not quite so far as hell:
My noble master, must I say farewell?

WITCH. (*Sings.*)

Venturous mortal
Treading alone,
This shadowy portal,
Dark and unknown:
See the first glimmer,
Of hell's lurid flame,
And cauldrons that simmer
And boil with the same;
Tell me thy name!

(*A red glow shows where the tripod stands.*)

S A U L .

My name is Ichabod—I thank your kindness,
 But fain would see my hostess : and so pray
 A less economy of fire and light,
 As I'm not wont to walk the way to hell.

WITCH. (*Aside.*)

A sportive guest! I'll pay thy wit, anon.

S A U L .

This seems the road to Sheol—but I'll on.
 I feel strange courage. Courage in the dark
 Is courage pure as gold. But hist—hush—hark!
 A flap—a flutter—and a dismal bark.
 Witch if thou dar'st, blow up that dying spark.

(*A light in the far end of the cavern.*)

WITCH. (*Singing.*)

The witch of the cavern is coming to thee :
 Now, tremble poor mortal whatever you be.

S A U L .

Poh! lives dame Magdiel in this den of thieves?

WITCH.

Oh, yes, and keeps a hostelry for rogues ;
 (*A red blaze lights up the cave.*)
 Behold, who gives you welcome.

S A U L .

Lilith's self!

I think I see the spouse of Be'lzebub ;
 Or hath this striding Anakim, the breasts
 And milk of womanhood?

SAUL.

WITCH.

Thou tremblest not.

SAUL.

Why should I? Is it daring to be here,
With a dried-up old woman? Prithee, dame,
Raise from the spirit-world the soul I call.

WITCH.

I fear thee for a mighty man disguised;
Thou know'st the king hath laws against the witches.

SAUL.

As the Lord liveth, I'll defend thee, woman.

WITCH.

Whom would'st thou see?

SAUL.

Bring up old Samuel.

WITCH. (*Stares at him, and screams.*)

Sathanas! Thou art Saul!

SAUL.

Be not afraid.

What seest thou, Magdiel? thou shriek'st awfully!

WITCH.

Oh, the Lord God ascending out of earth!
I called not for this ghost.

SAUL.

What form is he?

WITCH. (*Looking wildly.*)
 A mantle cowl's his head;
 His silver beard hangs low;
 An old man cometh up,
 Behold him, king, and know.

SAUL. (*Prostrating himself.*)
 'Tis he! Alas—my father—is it thou?

Darkness and silence.

SCENE V. *The same. The gleam of torches, and voices in the distance. ABNER and AMASA enter, with flambeaux.*

AMASA.

The darkness here is black, and hath a thickness
 Which light can scarce burn through.

ABNER.

Hold up thy torch;
 The glitt'ring pendants of the vault above,
 Will flash its gleaming back. Tread carefully!

AMASA.

Dost smell a curious aromatic here?
 The very air 's bewitched.

ABNER.

Step cautiously,
I hear the water dripping into pits
On either side; we tread a narrow way.

AMASA.

I scarce can see my feet; where is 't we go?
Let 's call the name of Saul, for I had thought
Never to walk so dark a vale as this,
Save in death's shadow.

ABNER. (*Calling.*)

Ho! my lord, king Saul.

AMASA.

Hark, how it echoes *Saul!*

ABNER.

It rings away
The name of Saul, in an abyss of distance.

AMASA.

But no strong voice comes back.

ABNER.

Stop, lift thy torch.

(*Discovers SAUL in a swoon.*)

Hither, Amasa! he has swooned away,
See his huge shape stretch'd lengthwise in the dust;
This damn'd enchantress hath been scaring him!

AMASA.

No wonder he 's no strength. I tell thee, Abner,
He hath not tasted bread, not all this day.

ABNER.

Nor all this night. Search out this cursed hag,
 She must set meat before him. Bear the king ;
 He 's in a swoon ; we must be back to camp
 Before the morning. Speak, my royal master !
 For love's sake ope thine eyes. Ho, here ! who 's nigh ?
 Oh, can it be he hath come here to die !

SCENE VI. *The cave on Gilboa. ZADOK the priest, reading the Morning Lesson from the book of Job ; a Levite holding a taper. JONATHAN entering, listens devoutly.*

ZADOK. (*Chaunting.*)

A dreadful sound is ringing in his ears,
 And in his pride, destruction shall come on him.
 He wanders in thick darkness, nor believes
 He shall return : but he is waited for
 Of the devouring sword. He wandereth,
 And begs a morsel of the stranger's bread,
 And faintly asks, *Where is it ?* Ah, he knows
 The day of darkness is at hand for him.
 Him anguish and distress shall make afraid ;
 And 'gainst him shall prevail, a mighty king
 Prepared for battle: for he stretcheth forth

His hand against his GOD—he strength'neth him
 Against the Lord Almighty—yea, upon
 His armed neck he rusheth ; on the boss
 Of GOD's thick buckler he hath dashed his soul.

(He folds up the volume.)

Here end the words of holy Eliphaz.

(To JONATHAN.)

Hail, prince ! Hast seen thy father ?

JONATHAN.

Nay, the dark
 Of an unquiet night is wearing off,
 And here I came to seek him. Where is Saul ?

ZADOK.

He will be back anon ! Lord Abner 's with him.

JONATHAN.

Already, moving lights among our foes,
 Shew they bestir themselves for fight to-day !

ZADOK.

Trust GOD : and be not doubtful of thy father.

JONATHAN.

I pray thee, was not Eliphaz a seer ?
 Perchance the lesson is a prophecy
 Of poor King Achish, and this awful day !

ZADOK.

Oh, let us all to prayer. The day will show.

The priest begins the prayers.

SCENE VII. *Gilboa. The battle raging below. Alarums; and enter JONATHAN, wounded.*

JONATHAN.

One moment's rest—I fear my wound is mortal,
 And David far away! I die alone;
 Only the Lord shall hear my parting sigh;
 God save my father—bless his Israel,
 And brace me for a moment's battle-work,
 To earn my death-thrust well. Once more to fight!
 But I must staunch my wound—here comes the king!

SAUL. (*Entering wildly.*)

Not in the fight, my Jonathan! Look down!
 'Tis a brave sight here, from this high Gilboa,
 But the king's son should be a part of it.
 I breathe a moment—but, behold my sword,
 How can thy spirit bear to dally here!
 Look, look, did'st ever see our arms do braver?
 The foe falls back! where's Merodach—where's Abner?
 He promised, with fresh men, to wait me here.
 That cursed Merodach is ever missing
 Upon occasion's spur. Now, burn the fiend!
 That driving glory to the vanward yonder,
 Should all be mine! The foe is in retreat;
 God for his people; up with the pursuit!

Oh, Jonathan, where 's my good blood in thee !
Up, sirrah !

(Flourish of trumpets. A runner enters.)

RUNNER.

Hail ! Lord Abner is approaching,
And begs thee tarry ; dost not hear his flourish !

SAUL.

But I would see his sword ! begone—bid haste !
Art whining for thy harper-friend, my baby,
That still thou tarriest ? By the Lord, sweet boy,
'Tis I, have slain the myriads to-day.

JONATHAN.

On, with thy majesty, my glorious sire !
I breathe a minute, from a little wound ;
'Tis but a scratch—I 'll after thee anon ;
All yet goes well.

SAUL.

A cursed hag, last eve,
Croaked of misfortunes—and played off such tricks,
That, full of agues, gave I word for fight.
But never yet the sword of Saul was redder ;
Forty Goliaths are already festering !
They can't o'ercome me—'tis a Balaam's curse,
Where 's Abner ?

(A flourish of trumpets approaching.)

RUNNER.

That 's his trumpet, please your grace.

SAUL.

Oh, where 's his banner ? See that gallant charge :
 What glory others reap ! I will not stay.
 Curse Abner's laggards—but look up, my son,
 The battle has been ours, since it begun !

JONATHAN.

But 'tis not over !

SAUL.

Over ! Lord of Hosts,
 Our standards are retreating. Bid them follow ;
 Ho, Abner—on—on—on !

ABNER. (*Entering with troops.*)

We come—we come ;
 Now blare away, and shout the Lord for Saul !

(*They dash into the battle.*)

JONATHAN.

Ah me, I cannot follow ! God forgive me !
 'Tis shame to look—while, like an avalanche
 From Libanus, this fresh-breath'd host rolls down.
 Ho ! how they open in the sea of strife
 Their billowy way ! Now Saul is in the battle,
 And at his very name I see them rally ;
 And Gath is fainter for his battle-cry.
 Baal, how thou bleed'st before him ! Like a leopard,
 He pounces from the rock. They crouch beneath him.
 Fight strongly, Abner ; oh, were I but there !
 Ah, 'tis too daring ; Saul doth press too far ;
 His snowy crest goes tossing o'er the billows

Of bowing legions, like the Red-sea foam
 Flaunting o'er Pharaoh's army. Lord, defend him !
 Ah me, the archers know his shining feathers,
 And every arrow points his helmet out.
 Who 's like thee in the battle, noble father,
 Pillar of Israel, tower of Judah's strength ?
 My God—'tis falling ! Strengthen me to die,
 Like a reviving Samson ! God for Saul,
 I cannot see it lost !

[Rushes down.]

DOEG. (*Entering, from behind a rock.*)

Ha-ha, blind fool,
 The battle 's lost already. Magdiel
 Foretold me all ; 'twas foresight, that of mine,
 To make my son lieutenant-armour-bearer,
 And give him place for nonce. Catch me a-bearing
 Saul's fated spear and buckler ! There he goes ;
 Lord Jonathan goes down to die for nothing.
 Ho ! How they cheer him ! Well-a-day—do hark.

SOLDIERS. (*In the battle.*)

The sword of Jonathan for Israel—rally !

DOEG.

The sword of Jonathan ! ha-ha ! the spindle
 Of mother Leah were a thousand better !
 But look, the lad fights well—who would ha' thought it ?
 Ah yes—God helps him—God ne'er helped his father.
 I pity Saul—he puts his trust in witches,
 And Sathan help his servant ! Who comes now ?

A WOUNDED SOLDIER. (*Entering.*)

Who's this stands idle ?

[*Runs back to the battle.*]

DOEG.

Oh, your servant, sir,

Run that way if you wish to die to-day !

Saul is a son of Sathan. Die for him ?

I'll see him rot first ! I know Saul :—catch me !

ABNER. (*Below.*)

Rally ! The king fights on—the Lord for Saul !

DOEG.

Ay-ay—but all wont do ! This pays ye well !

So much for turning off young master David !

I knew 'twould come to this—he'll be next king ;

I'll bear him the first news—he'll pay me for it.

Ha, there goes Saul ; the tiger 's up again !

Lord, how he threshes the Philistines down,

Right, left—on all sides ; how they fall before him !

Like Judah's lion, pawing thro' the brake,

From Jordan's swelling, how he bounds along.

Ha, that Philistine only shaved his plumes ;

They float like foam-caps on the wind ; he fells

The daring knave that reaped them : there, again

He smites a chieftain ; now the archers see him ;

They know the bracelet on his brawny arm,

That flashes as he strikes—they know the crown

Upon his bossy helm. There—Baal, he's down,

And flourish Rimmon's trumpets ! Lord, what cries !

Now Gathite and now Hebrew—what a Babel !

VOICE. (*In battle.*)

God fights not with us ; let the Hebrews fly,
Now, each for self!

DOEG.

I knew it—I thank God!
He's coming, is he?—Each one for himself,
So Doeg—off! [*Goes.*

(SAUL, *wounded by the archers, rushes in.*)

SAUL.

Give not the battle o'er!
Saul breathes again. Sound trumpets to the rally;
Cut down each coward that turns back! Where am I?
Covered with wounds—my noble sons are down:
No hand to staunch for me this gushing gap!
Once more strike with us, oh Omnipotent,
Strike till the battle's ours—then—then strike Saul!
[*Returns to the fight.*

DOEG. (*Returning.*)

He's loath to die. Thou'rt fallen, Lucifer.
Is this the Saul that was so terrible,
And belched an army, when he cried his name!
Now let Philistia laugh and shake her head;
Doeg, despised Doeg laughs at thee,
Thou wicked man, that mad'st not God thy trust,
But trusted'st in the devil. There again;
At 'em once more! 'Tis thy death-wrestle, Saul,
Thou diest hard; thy soul doth struggle out
In controversy; there, they fly once more.
Who would ha' thought a God-abandoned one

Could strike like that—there's mettle left him yet !
 In hand-to-hand, there is no matching him ;
 But there, the bowmen mark him once again.
 I like this archery—one fights at vantage,
 And not too near; I'll be a bowman next.
 Arrows on arrows! how the archers hate him!
 I see his crown go driving here and there,
 Backward and forward 'mid a sea of souls,
 And still his death-yell is—the Lord for Saul!
 Stop! there's a rain of arrows; like a beast
 Pierced in the reeds of Kidron, by a troop,
 I almost hear his roaring! Oh what groans!
 'Tis a new language in our mother-tongue;
 These all unheard of howls of agony
 From Israel's armies—and these shouts from Gath,
 Sure, ne'er were heard before. Now all is mingled:
 Oh, what a boiling sea is pouring hither,
 And swelling up the rocks! King Saul is flying,
 His hands stretch'd out to Heaven; and hosts like billows
 Are rolling after him. Away—away,
 The battle is the Infidels' to-day.

[Goes.

SAUL. (*Rushing in.*)

Remorse—remorse—what's life when it is done!

ARMOUR-BEARER. (*Entering, after him.*)

Courage, my master, let me staunch thy wounds!

SAUL.

Is thy name Doeg?

ARMOUR-BEARER.

I am Doeg's son.

SAUL.

If thou 'rt a Hebrew, run thy sword thro' me !
 Hear them pursue ! Oh, let it not be said,
 A curst Philistine tore my soul away ;
 I will not die by the uncircumcised ;
 Lift thy good sword, and through me !

ARMOUR-BEARER.

God forbid !

SAUL.

Oh there 's no time—they 're coming—hear them drive !
 The horsemen, how they trample ! Smite—smite me !
 Have I a thousand deaths ? I 've died a thousand ;
 Look at my gashes—where 's my double-edge ?
 (*Falls on his sword.*)
 Drink thy king's blood, Gilboa, and my soul—

A VOICE. (*In air.*)

Ha-ha !

SAUL. (*Swooning.*)

The laugh of Merodach !—my tempter's scorning !
 How shall it mock me thro' Eternity !

SCENE VIII. *A tower amid the ruins of Ziklag.* DAVID
with his guards, and a watcher.

DAVID.

No tidings yet ?

WATCHER.

At last, there 's one a-coming !
His running is like Doeg's.

DAVID.

Deathless dog,
He 'll bring but lies.

WATCHER.

His raiment is all rent,
And dust upon his head—I fear, 'fore God,
The battle has gone hard.

DAVID.

And where was I,
If Israel hath not sped ! Art sure of it ?

WATCHER.

The knave is near ! Haste, Doeg !

DOEG. (*Entering.*)

God defend thee !

S A U L .

D A V I D .

Whence art thou ?

D O E G .

From the camp of Israel!

D A V I D .

Out with the worst, I pray thee—out with it.
How went the matter ?

D O E G .

Sorely, sorely, sire,
Base rout—and acres fat with Hebrew blood,
And Saul is—

D A V I D .

LORD forbid !

D O E G .

Is dead at last,
And Jonathan, his son !

D A V I D .

Now hold me up,
God of my fathers!—but, speak out, thou churl,
How know'st thou Saul and Jonathan are dead ?

D O E G .

Oh, as I chanced upon the mount Gilboa,
The noble Saul did lean upon his spear,
Horsemen and chariots raving after him !
And when he looked behind, and saw me coming,
He called me, and I answered, here am I.
My boy, that bore his armour that sad day,

Lay at his side, self-slain. The king looked up
 And said *Who art thou*—for his eye was glassy ;
 On which, I told him an Amalekite ;
 For so I am ; it was no lie, my lord,
 Because—

DAVID.

Don't stop thy story thus, poor dolt.

DOEG.

He said, stand on me, for my soul's in anguish,
 And all these wounds can't let my spirit out.

DAVID.

Oh, said he that ?

DOEG.

He groaned it.

DAVID.

Oh, poor Saul.

DOEG.

I see him as he said it ; his dull eye
 Looked up imploringly ; I thought—how hard
 It is to die in battle ! So, in pity,
 I stood upon him and let out his life.
 Forgive me, sire, I knew he could not live ;
 And here 's the crown that was upon his head,
 The bracelet from his arm ; I've brought them hither ;
 See, here they are, and know I do not lie !

DAVID.

These are truth-telling tokens ! Rend all robes,

And sit in dust and ashes. Tell me more ;
How died my blessed brother ? didst thou see ?

DOEG.

My lord, in that last battle he fought well,
And pierced with many a death, gave up his ghost,
Like a departing angel.

DAVID.

Said he nought ?

DOEG.

He leaped to slaughter, calling oft thy name,
But, as they told me, on the battle-field,
Swooned quite away, when first his father fell ;
On which, a ranging soldier of that battle
Flew near him, and upheld him on his knee,
Till the young glory of our tribes went out.

DAVID.

There 's a new star in heaven—there let him shine ;
His was too mild a beauty for this earth,
And heaven hath claimed its own. What's left me now ?
Alas, I said farewell too merrily ;
Had I but known it was our last farewell !

DOEG.

My lord, the king did struggle—let me tell ;
Never went soul from body in such wise ;
There was a laughing in the viewless air,
As if the devil mock'd him.

DAVID.

God forbid !

DOEG.

Some say the laugh was Merodach's, my lord,
 And he was Sathan ! Saul was foully dealt with.
 Some say he sold himself to Lucifer,
 And was ta'en off.

DAVID.

Blasphemer, cease thy prattle ;
 The king *was* foully dealt with,—that a dog
 Like Doeg licked his blood. Thou slew'st him, then ?

DOEG.

Why, there he lay a-groaning and a-gape,
 With all Philistia rumbling after him,
 And praying Doeg for the love of God,
 To let his soul out.

DAVID.

Didst thou dare obey him ?

DOEG.

Did I not see that he was sure to die ?
 And then I knew lord David would be king,
 And I the first to hail him—Live king David !

DAVID.

Keep thy vile breath, poor sinner ; thou must die.
 I will not taint the air, with telling o'er
 The tithe of all thy thousand villanies ;
 Thou diest for this alone.

DOEG.

Is this my thanks ?

DAVID.

Oh, wast thou not afraid, as I have been,
To lift thy hand against the Lord's Anointed ?

(*To the WATCHER.*)

Guard, lead him out, and smite him that he die.

DOEG.

He was a monstrous sinner, mighty king,
And hated your high majesty—oh yes,
And always used your highness like a dog.
You would not kill poor Doeg! Let me live ;
And if it please you not, I 'll ask no pay,
Only I pray ye, let poor Doeg live.
I 'm good at keeping oxen ; you 'll have herds ;
I know the breeding-secret, good my lord,
Old Huldah taught me ; let me tell about her.

DAVID.

Hast thou no prayers to utter ? Lead him out,
And God have mercy on his stained soul !

DOEG.

Good Lord—is this in earnest ! Must I die ?
I 've more to tell. Oh, save me, gods of Edom !

(*He is dragged out, howling.*)

DAVID. (*Alone.*)

Now then, what changes shall come o'er the face
Of this dear land ! Will day and night, as ever,
Roll on the same, when thus, at head and spring
Of our affairs, the mighty wheels are broke
On which the world kept moving ? Lord of Hosts,

How are the mighty fallen ! at my feet,
 Unsought, unprompted, oh, how undesired,
 My oracles have laid the empty crown,
 And my old unction breathes afresh to-day,
 With fragrance of divinest right to wear
 The dread vicegerency of Jacob's God !
 Yet crown and bracelet, will we lay aside
 Till heaven shall show the time. Oh, costly things,
 How oft have ye been weigh'd with consciences,
 And valued with inestimable souls !
 (*Enter ABIATHAR, in his pontifical robes, attended by
 Priests, Levites, and Chiefs of Judah.*)
 Most reverend sire, your blessing !

ABIATHAR.

Worthy son,
 The broken van-guard of our tribes, at last,
 Turns, with one eye, to thee ! And here attend
 The priests of God and Judah's senators,
 To bring thee up to Abraham's terebinth,
 And there at Hebron, by his sepulchre,
 To crown his worthiest son, in room of Saul,
 And give it to the trumpets, to proclaim
 That Judah's sceptre is in David's hands,
 Unchangeable, till SHILOH's self shall come.

DAVID.

Not all the favours of a willing people
 Can make a rightful king : but we, for this,
 Of God himself were solemnly ordained,
 As more shall be unfolded, ere the hour

When from your priestly hand, we take our crown.
But oh, to-day, we have no heart to bear
The burthen of your homage. Mourn and weep ;
The beauty of our Israel lies cold
Upon her tallest mountains ; and, for once,
Philistia's virgins dance triumphantly ;
The daughters of the Infidel rejoice.
This day we do proclaim a solemn fast,
In tears and sack-cloth. For a fitting time,
The Memory of Saul is king alone,
And reigns in awful stillness. I, the while,
In mine appointed service at his court,
Will harp for him once more, and teach our maids
A heart-lament for Saul and Jonathan,
The lovely, and the pleasant in their lives,
Whom death hath not divided. And—while Time
Grows old, and loves to grow illustrious too,
With added glories of his noblest sons,
To our remotest issue shall he bear
The wail of our true-hearts, this grievous day,
When, for a brother I am sore distressed,
Whose love to me was passing wonderful,
Beyond the love of women ; and when, round,
Decked in the scarlet of his many spoils,
And the barbaric ornaments he won,
The daughters of Judæa weep for Saul.

NOTES.

NOTES.

THE history on which this Mystery is founded, is contained in the Books of Samuel, commencing with the twentieth chapter of the First Book, and ending with the first chapter of the Second Book. This history comprehends the events of about five years. After this reference, I shall only cite such texts as are of more minute consequence to the explanation of the Drama.

It may be proper to say, that I am not acquainted with any other Poem, in the language, plotted on the same incidents. Mr. Sothbey's Epic, which very probably occupies the same ground, I believe I have never seen, and am sure that I never read.

PAGE 15. *The good old paths, etc.*

Of course there is a secondary reference to the state of the kingdom in these words. See Job xxiv. 2, and Jer. vi. 16.

PAGE 15. *The mystic symbol of the Tree.*

This symbol is the Hebrew equivalent of the cross; and I have chosen to consider the stone of Ezel, as it were, a way-side cross. St. Justin Martyr says that Moses lifted up the cross itself, in the wilderness; referring, no doubt, to the symbolical character of the Brazen Serpent, and the form of the wood, on which it was suspended.

PAGE 18. *What time the flocks, etc.*

I have taken the liberty of supposing this a kind of Christmas gathering of the sons of Jesse. See I. Sam. xx. 6.

PAGE 19. *He hath been wont, etc.*

See I. Samuel xix. 3. So, in the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, 477 :

φοιτᾷ γὰρ ὑπ' ἀγρίων ἔλαν κ. τ. λ.

PAGE 20. *Breathed fatal odours, etc.*

See I. Samuel xvi. 13.

PAGE 21. *In Sheol.*

Sheol is the Hebrew *Hades*—the *Hell* of the Creed.

PAGE 21. *Borne by frail beauty, etc.*

See Genesis vi. 4.

PAGE 22. *I think some spirit, etc.*

A morbid state of the mind usually inspires such antipathies as are here represented; yet this line is meant to intimate the reality of what it suggests, as connected with future scenes in this Drama.

PAGE 23. *Where Moses stood, etc.*

See Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1.

PAGE 23. *Who made thee priest, etc.*

See I. Samuel xiii. 12. The sacrilegious usurpation of the priest's office by king Saul, under the pretence of necessity, was the beginning of his downfall.

PAGE 24. *Amid the stuffs, etc.*

See I. Samuel x. 22, 26; also, xi. 4, 5.

PAGE 24. *For like repenting Esau.*

See Genesis xxvii. 34, 36.

PAGE 29. *Like the old tree of Ormuz.*

That is the Banyan Tree.

PAGE 32. *Ho, let the Hebrews hear.*

Such seems to have been the form of proclamation. See I. Samuel xiii. 3.

PAGE 34. *Given us in wrath.*

See I. Samuel, xii. 16.

PAGE 35. *That woman-chorus.*

See I. Samuel xviii. 8.

PAGE 36. *Town o' Refuge.*

See Joshua xx. 2. This institution may well be supposed to have originated a cant expression; as we, in America, refer to *Texas*, when we speak of *the last refuge of a rogue*.

PAGE 39. *That thundered forth, etc.*

See I. Samuel xii. 18. Saul perverts the signification of this miracle, for his own ends.

PAGE 42. *A king like other nations.*

See I. Samuel viii. 5.

PAGE 51. *Beneath my maniple, etc.*

The powerful effect with which the Italian painters have accommodated the Jewish to the Romish Hierurgy, must have struck all, who are familiar with the great works of the 15th century, or even of a much later period. The Cartoon of Rafaele, in which the story of Heliodorus and the young men (II. Maccabees iii. 24) is represented, is an instance in point. I have thus taken the hint of using the equivalent phraseology of the Christian Ritual instead of the Hebrew terms, which would be unintelligible.

PAGE 53. *Like father Micah.*

See Judges xvii. 12.

PAGE 55. *At least they said so.*

See Numbers xvi. 3, 50. I. Cor. x. 10, 11, and the Epistle of St. Jude.

PAGE 55. *One ancient line, etc.*

The family of Eli. Compare, in modern history, the sacrilegious suppression of the Church of Scotland, by King William III.

PAGE 55. *I and my father's house, etc.*

The judgments that now fell upon the house of Eli, had been long foretold. See I. Samuel iii. 11.

PAGE 56. *Whom God shall judge not guilty.*
See St. Mark ii. 26.

PAGE 57. *When ulcers can't be saved.*
The reader will remember the famous lines from Ovid,
Cuncta prius tentanda, sed immedicabile vulnus
Ense recidendum est,

which were quoted with such applause in the Long Parliament, by the eccentric proposer of the Root and Branch manœuvre. See Lord Clarendon's History of the Rebellion, vol. I. 237.

PAGE 57. *That tallest cedar, etc.*
Sir Edward Deering described Laud as "the tallest cedar on the Church's Lebanon." See Southey's Book of the Church. The hint of the line immediately preceding, was taken in a similar manner; but from what, I am puzzled to say.

PAGE 58. *The Holy One, whom, etc.*
From the inspired eulogy of the priesthood, Deut. xxxiii. 8.

PAGE 60. *And with the gates unbarred.*
Two English bishops who died gloriously, have furnished me with the hint for Ahimelech's death-scene. Their names I need not mention. Popular history speaks ill of them; but I have been able, by independent investigation, to satisfy myself that it tells lies of one of them: and so, concerning the other, I take my motto from Sophocles:

ἀλλ' οὐ
ποτ' ἔγωγ' ἄν, πρὶν ἰδοίμ'
ὄρθον ἔπος, μεμφομένων
ἄν καταφαίην.

Æd. Tyrannus, 505.

PAGE 61. *And boasts for martial prowess, etc.*
See Ps. lii. 1, 4. The epithet "mighty" is applied to Doeg, in this Psalm, ironically. See Bishop Patrick.

PAGE 62. *And cast three handfuls, etc.*
This symbolical burial, familiar to classical scholars, may not have been usual among the Hebrews; yet, in the Christian Burial Rite, it is commonly practised; as, at the sentence

"earth to earth," etc. in the Anglican Ritual. Thus too, in Holy Baptism the Trine Aspersion, is symbolically a *burial* with CHRIST.

PAGE 63. *Are born with their anointing.*

So Bishop Patrick understands Exodus xl. 15, and such was the Hebrew comment; although a ceremonial of consecration was observed in case of the High Priest. See Lev. vi. 22.

PAGE 63. *To burn the incense, etc.*

Quoted from the inspired Eulogy of Moses, Deut. xxxiv. 10.

PAGE 64. *Let us depart from here.*

I need hardly quote the famous story of Josephus, concerning the voices heard at Jerusalem before its downfall, saying,

Μεταβαίνωμεν ἔρρηθεν.

PAGE 65. *The prophet Samuel comes, etc.*

See I. Samuel xv. 35.

PAGE 69. *The pillar Saul set up, etc.*

Saul erected a triumphal Trophy at Carmel, which was probably of a perishable nature; but I have chosen to consider it a pillar of stone, for the purpose of the Drama. See the story here referred to, I. Sam. xv.

PAGE 72. *Hath not an idol's ear.*

For, as described in the Psalm *Non Nobis*, idols "have ears, but they hear not."

PAGE 73. *Merodach.*

This name is associated in Scripture with the prænomén *Evil*, which to the common ear, has a very significant sense; and to the critical, conveys a meaning not at variance with the character to which I have given it. *Evil-Merodach* is well defined in an old family Bible from which I took the word many years ago, as meaning, *Despising the bitterness of the Fool*, or, *The fool grinds bitterly*. I ought to say, the accent is on the antepenult, throughout the Poem, as more agreeable to the verse than the more correct pronunciation.

PAGE 75. *And I will answer thee, like Lucifer.*

Goethe makes a similar reference to the book of Job, in his sublime, but fearfully profane, Prologue in Heaven.

PAGE 77. *Of evil yet to come.*

That is, the captivity of Babylon. See II. Kings xxv. 27.

PAGE 78. *Thou hast strong thighs, etc.*

"When Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him." I. Sam. xiv. 52.

PAGE 84. *An hour ere Sabbath eve.*

That is, on Friday; alluding to a trifling superstition, which may, nevertheless, be well introduced as a symbol; just as Leonardo, in his great picture, makes Judas overturn the salt.

PAGE 85. *Of Michal's marriage.*

Michal was the wife of David, whom Saul sacrilegiously gave to Phaltiel, or Phalti. See I. Sam. xxv. 44.

PAGE 92. *Routing with minstrelsy, etc.*

See I. Sam. xvi. 23.

PAGE 96. *My old sword and girdle.*

See I. Sam. xviii. 3, 4. It is beautiful to see the early covenant of these friends renewed in circumstances so altered. Compare I. Samuel xxiii. 16, 18. This scene is based upon the text—"And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God."

PAGE 111. *When from a scythed car, etc.*

As it was not lawful for the Hebrews to use horses and chariots, I have supposed Saul to use only such as he took in war.

PAGE 116. *The sweet al-henna.*

This is the plant referred to in the Canticles (i. 14) as "a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi."

PAGE 118. *Lie the rude rabble etc.*

See Genesis xiv. 11.

PAGE 119. *Waged the first battle.*

See Genesis xiv.

PAGE 127. *The wolf of Benjamin.*

“Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf.” See the prophecy of Jacob, Genesis xlix. 27.

PAGE 134. *In the dens of Sela.*

That is, in *Petra*; whose wonderful dwellings of rock, are now so familiar to us from the narrations of travellers.

PAGE 135. *He ought to tithe it.*

See Exod. xxxiv. 22. Levit. xxiii. 15. Deut. xvi. 17.

PAGE 141. *So tall was he, etc.*

See I. Samuel x. 24.

PAGE 143. *When lovely Rebecca, etc.*

See Genesis xxiv. 15. It would seem to have been the custom for even families of rank, to send their children for water, in this way. The prophet Jeremiah (xiv. 3.) says, of Judah and Jerusalem, “their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters.”

PAGE 145. *How Samuel, when the lamps, etc.*

For a child, the story of stories. See I. Samuel iii. and the preceding chapters.

PAGE 146. *The way they weep for Jephthah's daughter.*

See Judges xi. 39, 40.

PAGE 150. *These are Sodom's apples.*

Lorsque se fruit n'est pas encore mûr, il est enflé d'une séve corrosive et salée; quand il est desséché, il donne une semence noirâtre qu'on peut comparer à des cendres, et dont le goût ressemble à un poivre amer.—*Chateaubriand.*

PAGE 168. *And things more real.*

See Ephesians vi. 12.

PAGE 170. *And Pytho shall be praised.*

That is, *the Serpent* shall be praised. See I. Cor. x. 20.

PAGE 171. *And seven beside, etc.*

See St. Mathew xii. 45.

PAGE 183. *That vesper hymn, etc.*

Psalm xxxiv.

PAGE 183. *That filleth up the day.*

That is, *Complines*.

PAGE 187. *He lies within his chariot.*

"Within the trench," says the authorized version; but the Septuagint gives it as I have written. See I. Samuel xxvi. 7.

PAGE 188. *Barzillai, lord of Gilead.*

I could not forbear, in some way to introduce the name of this worthy old loyalist, whose after history was so honourable. See II. Samuel xix. 32.

PAGE 189. *Thou son of Zeruah, etc.*

See II. Samuel ii. 18, and iii. 39. Zeruah was the sister of David.

PAGE 195. *Like fair Aholibamah.*

Poetical fiction having made this the classic name, in our language, for one of the "daughters of men" mentioned in Genesis vi. 2, I have adopted it.

PAGE 208. *Jannes and Jambres.*

The magicians that withstood Moses. See II. Timothy iii. 8.

PAGE 209. *There's Reuben, etc.*

I have supposed the tribes to bear on their banners, as blazonry, the emblems appointed them severally, by their dying ancestor. See Genesis xlix. 1, 27.

PAGE 217. *Which old Potipherah, etc.*

When this passage was written I had not studied divinity.

and was quite unsuspecting that Potipherah might have been a true patriarchal priest of God, as Bishop Horsley seems to prove in his "Dissertation on the Prophecies of the Messiah, dispersed among the heathen."

PAGE 218. *Not for their daily meat, etc.*

I almost translate from Pindar,

ἀνοϊότερον
'Εσθλοὶ γίμονται βί-
τον, οὐ χθόνα παρῆσαν-
τες ἀλαῖ χερῶν.

Olymp. II. 111.

PAGE 219. *I dreamed of one, etc.*

"Thou spakest sometimes in visions unto thy saints, and saidst I have laid help upon One that is mighty." Psalter, lxxxix. 20. The allusion to Golgotha must hardly be considered as an anachronism; as I have a perfect right to avail myself of the conceit of the SS. Fathers, that Adam was interred there, and that Golgotha took its name with reference to his sepulchre.

PAGE 221. *Hermon.*

This name is improperly applied to a mountain near Gilboa; but as it suited me, I adopted the error, by virtue of the license *quidlibet audendi*.

PAGE 222. *Fought not old Barak, etc.*

See Judges iv. and v. The references to Sisera and Jael, Kishon, Megiddo, etc., will be sufficiently explained by these chapters, without further note.

PAGE 224. *Nor dew nor rain.*

See II. Samuel i. 21.

PAGE 225. *And tremble 'gainst my will.*

"And when Saul saw the Host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled." I. Sam. xxviii. 5.

PAGE 227. *In Canaanite temples.*

'The slaughter of Sisera would, by his own countrymen, be considered a kind of martyrdom; and therefore might be rep-

resented in their temples; so that even heathen shrines would attest the judgment of God in behalf of his people. For supposing such paintings in Canaanite temples, the temple of Dido in the fable of Virgil, would be authority enough,

Artificumque manus inter se, operumque laborem
Miratur; videt Iliacas ex ordine pugnas. *Æneid* I. 455.

PAGE 230. *A Gipsy, sir, etc.*

The Gipsies say they are Egyptian, as the name implies, and they tell the legend of Pharaoh. So says the best account of them that has appeared: but, were it otherwise, the time-honoured superstitions concerning them would justify this introduction of a Gipsy hag, in a fiction of Jewish history. See Borrow's "Zincali, or Gipsies of Spain," pp. 147, 211, 213. New York, 1842.

PAGE 232. *Your hand, my lord.*

This incident is designed as symbolical. The tempter would not see his victim murdered; but reserves him for self-destruction after greater guilt.

PAGE 236. *Bless thee, gentle cousin.*

Abner was Saul's uncle. The term *cousin* is here used, therefore, in the sense of *kinsman*.

PAGE 240. *Of Carmel yonder.*

Mt. Carmel which was in the same latitude with Gilboa, must not be confounded with Carmel, in Judæa, with which we have been concerned in former scenes. This is the Carmel afterwards so famous in the history of Elijah.

PAGE 244. *Au-au.*

The reader will recognize the classic *au*, pronounced *ow*, and used by Aristophanes, in "the Wasps," to imitate the bark of a dog. Terence has it latinized, apparently into an interjection of fear or disgust; thus, in the Eunuch, act iv. sc. iii.

An obsecro, mea Pythias. quod istuc
nam monstrum fuit?

And again, scene iv.

————— Au,
Ne comparandus hic quidem ad illum!

If I rightly recollect, it occurs in the Medea of Seneca, somewhat as I have used it, as a term of Incantation.

PAGE 244. *O'er Job's poor flesh, etc.*

See Job ii. 5, 6, 7. As demonical possessions were plainly permitted of old, I have felt less reluctance in allowing myself to feign the possession of a body untenanted of its soul; especially in the case of a family given over to temporal chastisement.

PAGE 245. *The thunder of the captains, etc.*

Abner quotes from Job xxxix. 25.

PAGE 247. *And keeps a vigil.*

"Ye that by night, stand in the house of the Lord." Psalm cxxxiv. 2.

PAGE 247. *Old Gad the seer.*

I. Sam. xxii. 5. I have introduced this prophet, for the sake of illustrating more fully the text I. Sam. xxviii. 6.

PAGE 253. *Now Lilith and Asmodai.*

Lilith, in Hebrew superstition, was the mother of devils. Of Asmodeus, enough is familiar to English readers, from the book of Tobit.

PAGE 254. *There are Amalekites.*

The scene I. Sam. xxx. 16 was probably occurring, at the time of the visit of Saul to the Witch. So say the critics.

PAGE 255. *Food for my friend, etc.*

So Mephistopheles, in Faust,

Staub soll er fressen, und mit Lust,
Wie meine Muhme, die berühmte Schlange.

PAGE 261. *My name is Ichabod.*

That is, one whose *glory is departed*; see I. Sam. iv. 21.

PAGE 262. *I called not for this ghost.*

This reconciles the opinions of the SS. Fathers, some of whom believed the Ghost of Samuel really appeared, while others revolt at the idea of his being called from his repose by the power of Satan. It is far more sublime, and quite in keep-

ing with the text, to believe that Samuel really appeared, by the mighty power of God, to the confusion alike of the witch, and of Saul himself. I have forborne to represent the conversation between Samuel and Saul, which must be supposed between the end of this scene, and the opening of the next.

PAGE 266. *The words of Holy Eliphaz.*

See Job xv. 21. The passage is singularly descriptive of Saul's condition on the eve of the battle of Gilboa.

PAGE 276. *Is thy name Doeg.*

The Jews have a conceit that this armour-bearer was Doeg; and that it was Doeg's son who bore the tidings to David. But I have just reversed the tradition, supposing Doeg to have substituted his son, as armour-bearer for the occasion.

PAGE 277. *For so I am, etc.*

In sketching this Mystery, I had resolved to make Doeg's story end in this way, to hint that the apparently severe punishment which David visited upon the young man who bore tidings of Saul's death, was probably only retributive justice, for many other delinquencies. It was not till I had consulted authorities, after the plan was matured, that I had any idea of the Jewish tradition that the lad was the son of Doeg, or of the fact, that an Edomite was necessarily an Amalekite, and hence that the inspired text is not much against my fiction. Such however is the case, according to Bishop Patrick.

PAGE 281. *And here attend, etc.*

See II. Sam. ii. 4.

PAGE 281. *Abraham's terebinth.*

Mamre is the ancient name of Hebron, and the "plain of Mamre so called in our English version (Gen. xiii. 18.) should be rendered the *terebinth* of Mamre. Here Sir John Maundeville saw a tree, which was said to have been green in Abraham's day, and to have dried up at the Crucifixion of our LORD. See Robinson's Researches, vol. ii. pp. 443, 454.

PAGE 281. *Till SHILOH's self shall come.*

The devout reader, will remember that the events which brought David to the throne, were, after all, not so much for

David's sake, as for the sake of Him who condescended to become David's Son. It was impossible that the sceptre should continue in the house of Saul who was of the tribe of Benjamin, since Judah had been divinely designated as the royal tribe. The events celebrated in this poem therefore have an important part in the history of our Redemption; and the incident with which it concludes, was the first in a long series which fulfilled the promise, "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, until Shiloh come." Gen. xlix. 10.

PAGE 282. *Harp for him once more.*

I am aware that some would naturally expect a paraphrase, or version, of the glorious lyric, contained in the first chapter of Second Samuel: but I was unwilling to attempt the gilding of refined gold by versifying the poetry of scripture, and therefore the Poem closes, with only an allusion to the sublime Lament of David, for Jonathan and Saul.

THE END.

HARTFORD:
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